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KINGS BEECHES

STORIES OF OLD CHUMS



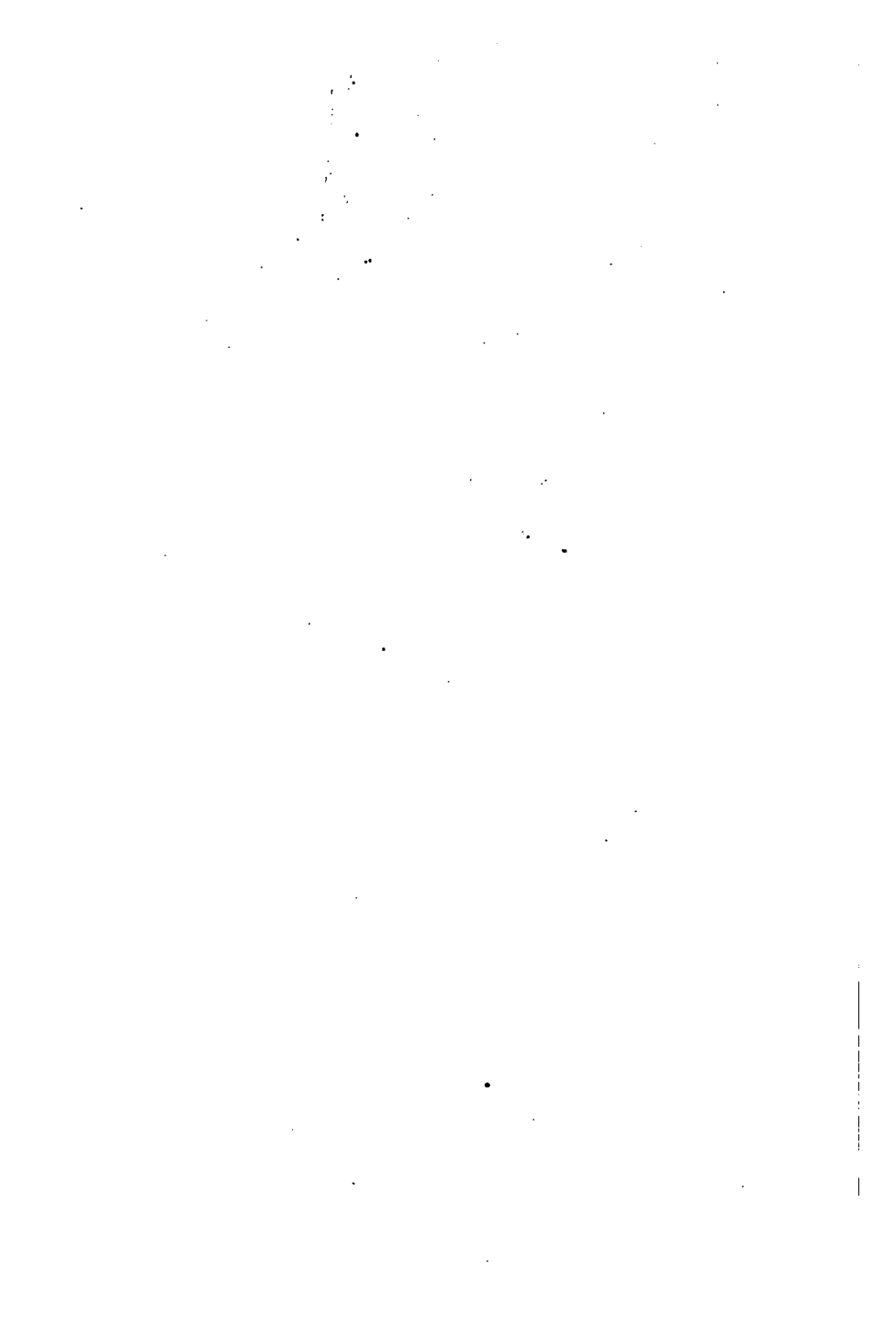
BY
STEPHEN J. MACKENZIE.



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Frontispiece

THE FAIR AT PITCHCOT.

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Frontispiece

THE FAIR AT PITCHCOT.



KINGS BEECHES

STORIES OF OLD CHUMS

BY

STEPHEN J. MACKENNA

AUTHOR OF "OFF PARADE," "PLUCKY FELLOWS," ETC., ETC.

WITH EIGHT ~~PICTURES~~



LONDON

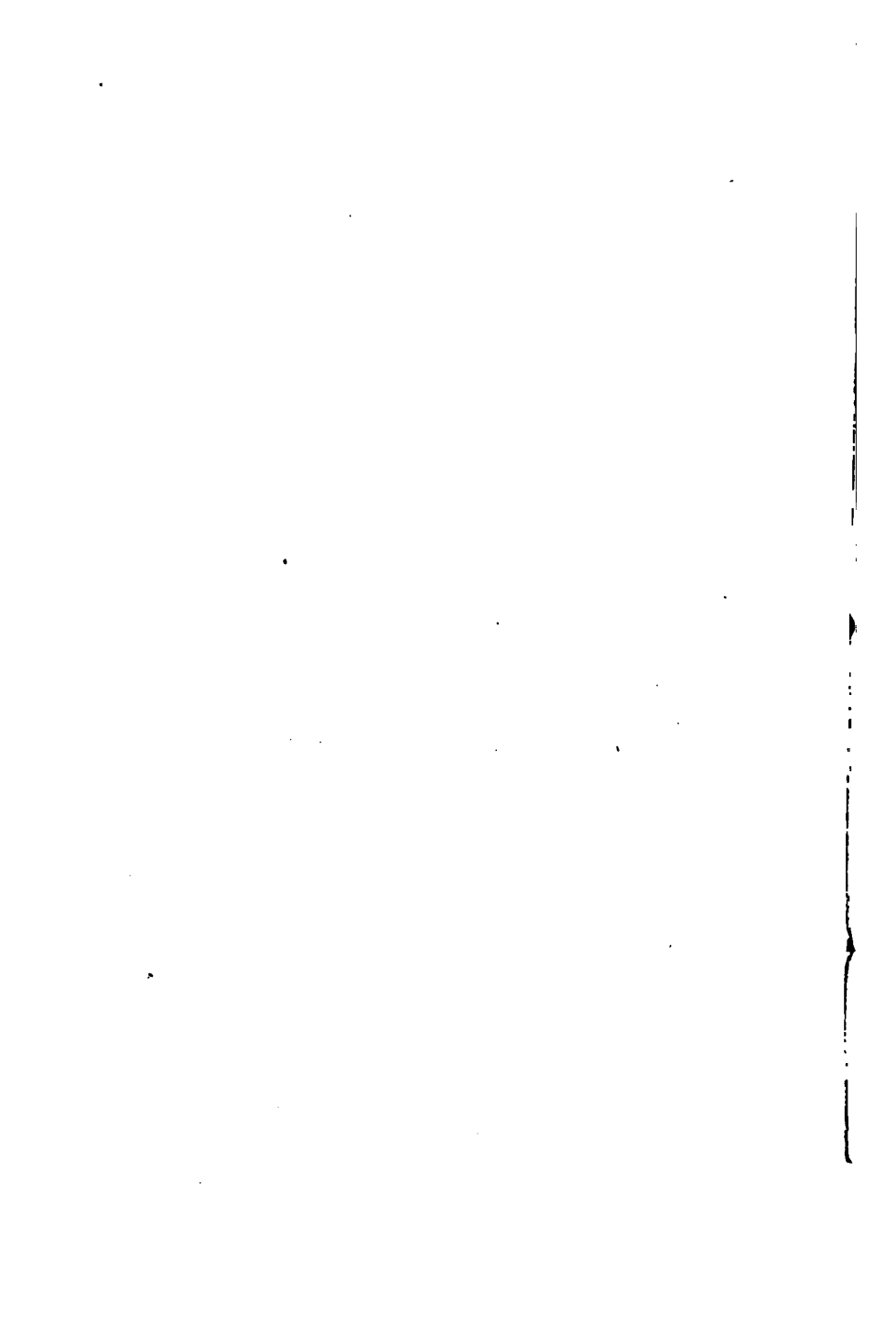
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Introductory.

RED WESKIT'S MYSTIFICATION.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE MYSTERY AROSE.

A SECRET! a dead secret, Peter! That's what I am here about; wouldn't you—eh!—like to know it, old boy? Yah! 'sold again!'” And Tom Foston, after executing a mad dance from side to side, dodged the burly old porter who guarded the barrier between boys' side and masters' side at Kings Beeches, dashed through the oaken doors, and scurried away down the passages that finally landed the explorer outside the rooms occupied by the Principal of the ancient proprietary school.

“A wild boy that! a very prankish youngster, who wants the cane, and plenty of it!” muttered old Peter

Westcott, better known, from a prominent portion of his attire, as Red Weskit to the numerous generations of boys who, a hundred at a time, had been educated at Kings Beeches for the fifty years Peter had been a servant in the establishment.

"Prankish! I'll teach him to cut his jokes at me, I will," he went on, as he retired a few steps into a sort of den, composed of boarding and glass, that possessed the singular merit of giving its occupant a glimpse of what was going on in nearly every direction. It looked to masters' side, to boys' side; it afforded a view of the passages leading to the servants' offices; it showed a considerable portion of the avenue that led up to the great southern door; and it gave a look-out over a fine expanse of undulating meadow stretching upwards towards the hills, timbered with splendid beech trees, and forming part of the playground attached to the college.

"I say, Peter—Peter!" half called, half whispered a sallow, lantern-faced boy, peeping through the oak door; "where's Foston off to, eh? Did you see the letter he had just now?"

"Yes, I did," was the dry reply.

"Who was it from? what did it say? what's he down masters' side for?" All these questions came tumbling out in a rapid volley. "I have often told you, Master Trevor, that you should mind your own business, and not be always spying into other folks' affairs." Peter delivered himself of this rebuke with

great dignity, as he resumed the reading of the previous day's *Times*. He did not choose to let it be known that he was ignorant of anything that went on; and though he spoke the truth when he said he had seen Tom Foston's letter, he forgot to add that it was only the outside of it that had been submitted to his inspection.

"Well but, Peter, don't be cross now," went on Trevor, who was a terribly curious fellow—a regular Paul Pry, as well as a bit of a bully, and a noted foe of Tom Foston's. "He's been in such a state since he got it a quarter of an hour ago; dancing about like mad, reading bits of it to himself and laughing, and he wouldn't tell even old Hardbake—and you know what chums those two are—what it was all about; and then he cut a lot more capers, yelling out to us 'There's going to be such a jolly lark!' and danced away down masters' side here without asking leave!"

Peter listened to all this so as to make himself, as far as possible, master of the situation, when, laying down the *Times*, he got up from his great easy-chair, walked Trevor back again through the oak door, and dismissed him in his most solemn manner, and just as if he knew all about the affair.

"Now, you just be off, Master Trevor; I don't intend to encourage your curiosity by telling you anything;" and he shut the door with a great bang.

"I'll have it out of him before studies, if I have to take the letter from him!" said Trevor, as he joined

his comrades, rather crestfallen at having been unable to pump Red Weskit on this occasion as he had so often on others.

"Take the letter from him!" said Hardbake (Jimmy Lorton was his real name, but he had been nicknamed as above from his passion in earlier days for that sweetmeat); "I'd like to see you; he thrashed you last time, almost!"

"Thrashed *me*! No, he didn't!" "Yes, he did!" "Well, he will next time!" "It isn't in him!" and such like cries, broke from the respective partisans of Foston and Trevor, promising to end in one or two extra battles in connection with the long-standing feud between the two, when the bell luckily rang for studies, and peace was re-established *pro tem*.

Tom Foston did not return to class for half an hour; and then, after again managing to elude all intercourse with Red Weskit, he looked so grave, solemn, and important—the secret of his interview with the Principal swelling within him—that some of the fellows would have given anything for a chance of pummelling it out of him, while others would have preferred a quiet stroll in some shady corner of the playground to try if a little wheedling and soft sawder, in the place of physical force, would not produce the same effect of extracting the mystery—for mystery it certainly was—that Tom Foston should have a letter at all; for he hardly ever got one, as he had only one brother living, and

he was supposed to be travelling in foreign parts ; that having got one, he should keep its contents secret—for, generally speaking, after his chum Hardbake had read them, they went the round of the school ; that he should have made such a fuss about this one, and run away with it to the Principal ; and, finally, that Dr. Glover should have thought so much of the rubbish (so in their affected contempt they called it) as to keep Tom for three-quarters of an hour talking over it : all this was simply outrageous. And it was evidently not a private affair, because Tom had distinctly announced that there was going to be “ a jolly lark,” and that of course meant for all, and not himself alone. Tom’s own class quite determined, by hook or by crook, to find out what it was all about before the day was over ; because they could not see why “ such a fellow ” should know a public matter that none of them knew ; it was too bad, and must not be endured. They had to wait, however, with what patience they might, and in the meantime we may as well see what the porter thought of the matter.

Now, Peter Westcott was quite a man of note in his way. At ten years of age he had been taken on as shoe-black at Kings Beeches, when many of the present boys’ fathers had been pupils there ; had risen rapidly, owing to his excellent qualities ; and for thirty-five years had occupied his present position of porter nominally, general factotum and major-domo in reality, in the old school. He was on friendly terms of respect-

ful intimacy with Dr. Glover and the masters, but he was no sneak or spy ; he was father, mother, sister, and brother to most of the boys during at least the months of tuition ; he looked after their wardrobes, their pocket money, their health, their scrapes, and their sports ; he knew everything and everybody that had ever been connected with the place ; and he was a living almanac as well as record of all that had or might have occurred, or ought to occur, at Kings Beeches. In fact, what his peculiar den was in a physical point of view—a sort of debateable land between masters' and boys' sides—he himself was between the rulers and the ruled—a go-between, or ambassador rather, maintaining a judicious neutrality that was useful as well as agreeable to both tutors and lads. In person he was tall ; stately in his corpulence (which became him) ; possessing a fine open broad face of a healthy red ; bushy but well-trimmed whiskers of the orthodox cut of fifty years ago, and white as white whiskers possibly could be ; a kindly grey eye that yet could be severe and piercing ; and a half-bald head with a thick fringe of hair exactly the same hue as were the whiskers. On assuming the portership, he had also assumed the red waistcoat from which he obtained his nickname, while the remainder of his attire was always of black cloth—an incongruous mixture that yet seemed to suit him. He had a kindly, friendly heart ; and yet he always endeavoured to appear dignified and stately. Some called him crabbed (from his constant efforts to maintain that dignity), but

he was not at all so in reality ; he was perhaps irritable and easily offended, but he was just as easily pacified ; his great fault was curiosity, or perhaps it would be better described as a desire to sustain that character for omniscience which he considered essential to his position ; and he was decidedly apt to find fault with everything and everybody, though, on explanation or confession, he readily forgave. For the rest—he was as keen and shrewd an observer of character, particularly of boyish character, as could be met with anywhere ; and while he was sustaining and affectionate to the good, he pitied and gave excellent advice to the bad, while he endeavoured to screen their faults as long as any hope remained that the culprits would become amenable to wholesome influences. One of the then masters, in his earlier years at Kings Beeches, had taken a fancy to the boy, and in spare hours imparted to him an amount of general useful knowledge, which Peter so improved upon by subsequent private study, that he was, perhaps, at sixty years of age, as well-informed a man as could be found in his position in life.

Peter's dignity was hurt on this occasion of Tom Foston's escapade, and his curiosity was excited by the incidents of the receipt of the letter as detailed by Trevor. He therefore determined to re-assert the one and satisfy the other in a very simple manner, viz., by complaining, as he was in duty bound to do, that the former had broken one of the strictest rules at Kings

Beeches by passing the oak door without leave, and in direct opposition to Peter's own lawful commands.

"It was very wrong indeed of him, Peter," said Dr. Glover, when the complaint had been detailed in quiet and mild terms—for Peter never, unless greatly aggravated, and but seldom then, allowed exaggeration to get the better of him; "very wrong; I shall speak to him about it when he comes to me to-morrow morning."

"Is he to come then without leave, Doctor? I don't know, you see, what his business is, and it is against all the rules for him to pass the oak door without my knowing what it is for."

Dr. Glover turned his face towards the mullioned window to conceal a smile at Peter's "fishing" question and remark combined.

"He certainly must obey the rules—hem; but on this occasion—eh, Peter?—you see it's a little secret of—of his and mine and—well, of somebody else's also; and I think if you will excuse him just for the next few days—eh, Peter? ——"

"Certainly, Doctor," answered the old man in his most stately manner, and with a formality he did not usually employ; "it is no business of mine—only the rules are rules, and ——"

"Well, but it *is* business of yours—no—well, I hardly meant that," the Principal went on, hastily recovering himself when he saw the old man's face wearing a most puzzled look. "Just to oblige me, think no more of it, Peter, and let him pass when

he comes; you shall know all in good time—"this with a kindly look that however did not at all mollify the porter, who bowed and retired in a most unmistakable state of annoyance to brood over what he had heard instead of going on with his *Times*. Indeed he was very much offended. Here was this scampish Tom Foston—a much wilder lad than his elder brother Bob, who had been a great admirer and supporter of Red Weskit in days gone by, and had kept up the acquaintance ever since by occasional presents of choice snuff, of which the porter partook largely—this Tom was to be allowed to beard him; to pass to masters' side without leave, licence, or reason, whenever he chose; was to have a secret in the house—with the Doctor too—and he, Peter, not to have any idea what it was; and, worst of all, it was on Peter's own business, as Dr. Glover had plainly said! He had never been so treated before in his life; all sorts of outlandish fears for his position—nay, even for his very place itself—came torturingly through his brain; and then the disgrace of the thing: it would be known all over the school that there was something Tom Foston knew in common with Dr. Glover, while he, Peter, was as ignorant of it as any of them; it would break up and ruin his authority altogether; it was an end to all his dignity; it could not be borne—what was he to do?

It ended, as such things not unfrequently do, by his sitting down to fret and fume, and promise himself all

sorts of retribution: he would retire altogether—he would stay on and shame Dr. Glover—he would suddenly go away and abandon Kings Beeches to its fate (he was always convinced the college could never be maintained without him)—he would denounce the Principal's conduct to the governors at their next meeting—he would——

“I say, Peter, I am so sorry I offended you this morning; I really did not mean it; pray forgive me.” It was Tom Foston who came quietly into the “den” (by the way, it was always called that by every one except its owner), in deference to a brief order he had privately received in writing from Dr. Glover.

Peter was on his stilts at once.

“The Doctor says you have done nothing wrong, Master Foston, and it is not my place therefore to say you have.”

“Ah! but he don't know the way I bothered you, Peter, or he wouldn't say that. I'm awfully sorry; do say you'll forget and forgive. And the whole thing about the letter is only bosh; there, I promised my brother faithfully I wouldn't tell a soul but the Doctor and another; and there—well, it's only about my brother. I must cut away or I shall tell you all. Make it up, Peter.”

There was a jovial twinkle in the lad's eye—his brother's—that Peter could not resist altogether.

“Get along with you for a foolish youngster! What do you think I want to know of your trumpery nonsense?”

"All right, Peter; you're a good old man again!" said the harum-scarum boy as he saw he had softened Red Weskit a little; he ran off for fear he should be pressed again on the point, and disappeared into boys' side once more.

But Peter, though he had certainly softened a little, had by no means forgiven Tom altogether; and this horribly annoying secret weighed heavily on his heart and could not be removed, or even set aside for a moment. So he was very stately, distant, and reserved to Dr. Glover when superintending the masters' dinner in the Great Hall that evening; and the under-servants, who knew nothing of the matter, wondered what on earth had interfered to disturb the serenity of old Red Weskit (as they also called him), and make him so "stand off" to every one, high and low. Some put it down to one thing, some to another, but the prevailing impression was that the old porter intended giving up his place when his fifty years' service should be complete—an event that, it was well known, would come to pass in ten days from that date. They supposed the arrangements between him and Dr. Glover had been concluded that morning.

CHAPTER II.

HOW IT BECAME INTOLERABLE TO ENDURE.

KINGS BEECHES was a grand old place, dating from the Tudors. It lay in a broad undulating valley, or hollow rather, amidst breezy hills that overlooked the sea, in the pleasant southern county of Coastshire. Almost in the centre of this hollow stood the quaintly gabled and windowed house, of many and most incongruous styles of architecture that could hardly be described, or even separated one from another, so strangely were they netted and interwoven. Men of note, learned in the histories and mysteries of all the principal buildings in the country, came down to examine this one, and went away again puzzled about fixing the date of the commencement of the pile, or even the probable period when it first became a habitation for man. If you were to take a fortalice, a few round towers, some of the earliest patterns of dwelling-houses, a castle or two, and a few disjointed portions of churches, monasteries, and chauntries—if you were to take models of all these, shake them up in a giant dice-box and fling them out on the bright green sward, dig into lengths of moat here and there, nearly surround the whole with old-fashioned gardens and pleasure-grounds, add splendid beech-trees in rich profusion,

turn on a bright sparkling stream fed by many dancing rivulets—then, and not till then, might you get some such paradise for school-boys as was Kings Beeches. For, depend upon it, if you wish to captivate boys—be they old or young, good or bad, wild or meek, study-loving, adventurous, or stay-at-home—there is nothing like putting them in a great rambling old house with no end of passages, nooks and corners, staircases leading next to nowhere, old-fashioned panelled rooms built apparently without object, towers, windows of every style and plenty of them, and a mysterious history attached to make the nervous and excitable tremble in their beds when the weird equinoctial gales are moaning and roaring by turns all around the old walls. Add to these attractions such fine grounds, such lofty trees, such hills and such hollows, such streams and such ponds as abounded in Coastshire, and you have every chance of succeeding in your design. The front—if it could be said indeed to have any particular front at all—anyway the great door, faced the south; and in that direction led the tree-shaded avenue which, surmounting the natural rise out of the hollow, brought one to the high road leading to the very important (in its own estimation) town of Buncombe, some twelve miles away. In the other direction the road took you to the village of Pitchcot—a straggling, idle, dirty little place, whose inhabitants seemed to follow no particular occupations beyond poaching and leaning over their half doors smoking and staring vacantly into the

street. Its chief attraction and pride was the jolly, comfortable, and thoroughly genuine old-fashioned inn, called the King's Rest—a noted hostelry for visitors to Kings Beeches, and for such stray hunting-men as got belated in returning from their sport. This village lay barely a mile from the College, and was a constant source of annoyance to the Principal and masters, who had plenty of trouble on their hands in keeping their pupils from being contaminated by its influences.

Such was Kings Beeches and its surroundings. In former days the whole locality had been monastic property; afterwards it fell into the hands of the Crown—hence its name; after that again it was owned by a noble family who, becoming decayed in their fortunes, sold it away to others who passed it on in turn, until ultimately, many a long year before this record commences, it became what it now is—a proprietary college of character and position for the cadets of good or wealthy families. There were many tales and traditions about the rare old place, but with these we have no need to trouble just now.

“Are you going to let us have a look at that precious letter?” asked Trevor, the evening of the same day, swaggering up to Tom Foston during play.

“No, I'm not!”

“But I'll make you.”

“You couldn't if you would—I mean you couldn't any way, for I haven't got it.”

“Haven't got it! Come, that is a good one, too.”

"Good or not, it's true; the Doctor has it in his pocket at this moment."

"Oh, how grand we are!" sneered Trevor, who was surrounded by a party of his supporters.

"Any fellow can be 'grand,' as you call it, towards a fool!" retorted Tom Foston, who was unmistakably excited over his secret.

There seemed to be a fair chance of a row, and fellows gathered round to enjoy the fun; but Trevor felt that the other was speaking the truth, so he resolved to husband his resources until he really was certain Foston had his letter back, when he would make a fight to get hold of it. He didn't think there would be anything dishonourable or mean in doing so, nor did indeed most of the other fellows; for Foston had, in the course of the day, told lots of them that it was a public matter that concerned them all, and therefore they concluded that he was keeping it from them only to make himself big. That being so, it was just and lawful to take him down a peg.

The next morning Foston was closeted again with Dr. Glover, and came out in the playground afterwards a bigger chap than ever. Mysteriously, he nodded to his chum, Hardbake, and the two went off together for a confab in the Beech Walk, which extended round from one corner of the Ball Alley to where the cricket ground commenced. Eager eyes followed them, and the excitement grew intense as they were seen to pace to and fro in conversation, until at last Foston produced the

letter and handed it to Hardbake, who evidently expressed astonishment and pleasure as he read it. He looked it over and over, turned it round to see if there was any more, and then, as they again approached the corner of the Ball Alley, handed it back to his comrade. This was the opportunity Trevor was seeking; rapidly and silently he passed along the back of that erection, where he could not be seen by them; as they came to the end of the Beech Walk, he jumped out, snatched the letter from Foston's hand, and made off with it. The latter flew after him in a moment; both put forth their utmost speed; it seemed certain that Trevor must escape. Ah! what's that? His foot caught against a stone; he stumbled—once—twice—and fell heavily! In a second Tom had him by the neck, turned him over on his back, twisted the letter out of his hand, and slipped it into his pocket. Trevor got up, shook himself, and flew at his adversary. Both were out of breath, and all flurried with the race. They sparred wildly, and neither was touched. The other fellows had come rushing up when they saw the tumble; they interfered, and said there must be a fair fight for the letter, which was to be held by Jack Dawson (the cock of the school, who affected not to know or care anything for the mystery); coats off, and all fair and proper. The two agreed, preliminaries were arranged, and they had just commenced, when who should come strolling up in that direction but the Principal himself! There was no help for it; the crowd dissolved like

snow ; the combatants hastily resumed their jackets. Jack Dawson said Tom Foston was entitled to the letter till the fight could come off, and they separated. Tom Foston went away rapidly with the prize in his possession ; gained the playroom, where there was a fire, and, before any one could interfere, publicly burnt the letter ! There was a howl of baffled rage and disappointment ; but there was no help for it, and Tom and Hardbake remained triumphant—the sole possessors of the secret.

But things got worse and worse. The two lads were actually sent by Dr. Glover himself—at least they went without leave from any of the other masters—"beyond pale," as it was called : that is, beyond the boundaries on boys' side. What on earth could it all mean ? They went up the avenue and over the brow of the opposing rise from the hollow ; but whether they took the road towards Buncombe or Pitchcot could not, of course, be seen. That point, however, was settled by Trevor the same evening ; for by dint of closely questioning every one who passed along the avenue, which led by a back way to the farm, and also to the College private gas works, he learned from a country lout that the two had certainly gone into Pitchcot, and when last he saw them were near the King's Rest. They came back in about three-quarters of an hour—very grand, and solemn as judges or ministers of state with all the cares of the kingdom on their hands—but it was found hopeless to endeavour to extract anything from them. All that was really known was that Tom Foston had

a letter for Dr. Glover, which was at once delivered. The same thing went on nearly every day for more than a week, and on one or two occasions the lads were actually accompanied by Dr. Glover himself! When this was known the excitement in the school positively knew no bounds, and fellows began to declare they could not get a wink of sleep, but lay in their beds tossing to and fro all night, and wondering and wondering until the call came to get up again. But when it leaked out that these visits were really paid to the King's Rest in Pitchcot, affairs became quite alarming in their intensity of mystery, and one funny chap declared he was getting so thin and pale through anxiety that he had written to his governor threatening to commit suicide if he was not at once taken home!

Poor Peter Westcott! his state was really pitiable; for what between having to pretend, with many a wink and nod, that he knew all about it but was bound to say nothing, and the miserable consciousness that he was an arrant impostor as well as a broken and injured man, his life was a burden to him, and he was a prey to distracting thoughts that nothing could quiet. Several more letters (a most unprecedented thing) came from Tom Foston's brother Bob, with the London post-mark, and they were all handed over to Dr. Glover, who kept them instead of giving them back to the owner when read. Even the other masters knew nothing of what was going on, and the efforts Red Weskit had to make to keep up his pretence of know-

ledge before them, when they asked him questions on the subject, were simply stupendous ; with the boys he became sullen and morose—so different from his usual manner, that it was currently believed in the school that he was going wrong. Towards the under-servants he was bitter and harsh ; so much so that they whispered amongst themselves that old Peter was surely going to “get the sack.” Towards Dr. Glover he maintained a stately distance that was very ludicrous to witness ; while, as for Tom Foston and Hardbake, he affected to treat them with a silent contempt that he was really quite unable to *feel*—they knew this secret, while he, Peter Westcott, knew absolutely nothing !

Dignity, position, knowledge of what was going on at Kings Beeches, were now all lost to him—he was wretched in every sense of the word, and if he could have submitted to the relation of his sufferings to any one, that man must indeed have been flinty-hearted who could have helped pitying the poor old major-domo.

“Visitor for Master Foston !” called out Red Weskit, in his stateliest manner, throwing open the door of the room, where Foston’s class were at evening studies, the ninth day after that first horrible letter had arrived. Foston rose at once without a trace of flurry or surprise and walked out of the room. Now, such an event had never been known to occur to Tom before ; positively he had never had a single person to see him all the time he had been at Kings Beeches—and now he gets up and walks out as if it was a matter

of every-day occurrence! It is too bad—really monstrous! The whole class grumbled; but they might just as well have howled at the moon for all the good they got by it; so they held their tongues and tried to go on with their studies. But it was no use; they simply *could not* keep their minds off Tom Foston and the events of the past nine days.

When Tom arrived at the den, he found the Boots from the King's Rest waiting for him; he at once blurted out, "Your brother's come ——"

"Hush, hush!" cried Tom; but it was too late; Red Weskit was close behind him and had heard Boots' remark. Tom looked at the old man with a half sorry, half amused glance. Peter pretended to take no notice, but walked straight into the den and took up his paper. A sudden thought occurred to Tom, that it was hardly safe to leave Hardbake exposed to the temptation of telling when unsupported; so whispering to the Boots not to say a word more, he passed to Dr. Glover's chambers, readily obtained his request, sent for Hardbake, and the trio made off to the King's Rest, and were seen no more on the College premises that evening.

Peter Westcott did not sleep one wink that night; his deep-seated annoyance at the mystery had reached a point at which it could not be borne; he made a solemn and deeply-thought-over resolution that he would see Dr. Glover in his business hours in chambers the next day, and then and there resign his situation.

It was hard and bitter to give up this way after fifty years' arduous service, but there was no help for it; and somehow the firm determination the old man had come to soothed him, and now that he felt all was over and the worst passed, in the early hours of the morning he slept well.

CHAPTER III.

HOW IT ENDED IN ———.

“By Jingo! here’s a jolly spree!” shouted the usually imperturbable and *nil admirari* Jack Dawson, rushing into the playground the next morning about ten o’clock.

“What is it? What’s up? What’s the lark, Daw?” and a whole budget of similar questions came from the fellows who were within earshot of the cock’s exclamation.

“Why, I hardly know what *is* up; only old Glover sent for me just now, and said we were to have a holiday!”

“A holiday! a whole holiday?”

“Yes, a whole holiday; he did not say why, and sent me about my business before I could ask.”

A wild ringing cheer greeted the announcement from those near, and was taken up from one to another of the numerous groups of students, till the old woods of Kings Beeches echoed again to the glorious huzzaing. Then the fellows cooled down a bit, and began discussing the reasons of this strange whim of the Principal’s—he was not very much addicted to holiday-granting at any time, but he had never been known to give one gratuitously before. Then they set to work

discussing plans for the day's amusement, making elaborate arrangements for this, that, or the other sport. All fell to the ground, however, for at eleven o'clock precisely the large bell rang, to the astonishment of everybody, and some of the masters came out with the news that all were to assemble, in their proper marshalled order, in the Great Hall immediately. There was another cheer at that. They knew there must be something very strange and good in the wind; but the curiosity and excitement grew wilder than ever when Tom Foston and Hardbake walked coolly in from masters' side and took their places in the ranks silent and deaf as mutes, but wearing a triumphant sort of expression on their faces that it was very galling for the ignorant to bear. Many a sly knock, push, or kick did they receive as they passed along to their own numbers; but they took no notice and held their peace. The whole school was then marched into the Great Hall, which, to their boundless surprise and disgust, was perfectly devoid of any being or thing which might afford some clue towards the solution of the mystery. There we must leave them for a brief while, to see what was going on elsewhere.

Red Weskit was bewildered. He heard of the holiday, and it made him worse; next, he learnt from one of the younger servants who had been on an errand to the King's Rest, that that hostelry was *crowded* (so the man said) with fine gentlemen, who all declared they had been pupils at the College; he was told by

some one else that there were great preparations being made at the same place for a grand dinner—"a grander sight," the informant averred, "than even when the farmers had their annual club feast there;" and some one else—Red Weskit could never for the life of him afterwards remember *who*—insisted that the reason of it all was that Dr. Glover was going to be married to Bob Foston's sister! Then the old man, with a sad and downcast heart, went, at the Principal's unfailing hour for transacting all College business, down the long passages, and by the mullioned windows, every scratch in which he knew and could tell the history of, towards Dr. Glover's chambers. More than once, so intensely and bitterly melancholy were his thoughts, his heart would have failed him in carrying out his resolve of the previous night; but the shouts of joy that came in from the distant playground galled him, and the hum of excitement made by the under-servants in their wonderment at what it all meant was unbearable. These things too plainly told him that he was, like them all, ignorant and degraded in the place where for fifty years—ay, fifty years this very day—he had been a trusted and tried adherent. That thought braced him up on each such occasion, and he went on. But lo! another strange thing he had never known—Dr. Glover was absent from his chambers at the appointed business hour, and had left no word to say when he would be back. Well, well, it was but another blow—another mystery—so he went back more slowly, more sadly

than he had come; and when he reached the den, he sat down wearily in his old arm-chair, utterly depressed. Strange memories of those long fifty years came thronging through his brain; old forgotten events came before his mind's eye clear and distinct as though they happened but yesterday; forms once loved and respected stood out from the grim canvas painted by death as clearly as though life still held them in reality; fair young faces, flushed with the eagerness of boyish adventure, flitted around him rehearsing the pranks of their happy days at Kings Beeches—faces that never would flush again; visages grave, kindly, if stern sometimes, of long-passed-away masters, came to him with the affectionate, cheering words of counsel and esteem with which they came to him in the old times—masters that no teaching or learning would ever trouble again; old tales, old histories, old songs, old chaunts—even the old moaning, wailing cries of fever-stricken boys, lying on the little beds from which they were never to rise, in a remote year when disease haunted the house like a foul fiend—all floated back into his mind on a flood of acute grief, and the old man placed his head in his hands, and tears (that he never thought to know again) came bursting from his eyes!

“Peter, Peter, old man, look up! dear old chap, it's only me, Bob Foston. That's right; you're all yourself again,” he went on as he saw Red Weskit make a convulsive effort to subdue his emotion. Then he turned away to one of the many windows of the

den, to give his old friend time to recover himself.

"Why, Master Bob," Red Weskit at length asked, rising and going towards the young man, "I never thought *you* would treat me so. What is all this about? My old brains seem gone a wool-gathering."

"Why, it's all about you, Peter!"

There was a fine heartiness in the clear, joyous laugh that broke from Bob Foston; it cheered the old man like rich wine.

"About *me*, Master Bob! There's but a little left for me in Kings Beeches now. I'm going—going to leave." He nearly broke down again as he half-sobbed out the words.

"So you are, Peter. So you are, dear old boy, going to leave this very day, too! What do you think of that? Now, just come along with me, and I'll tell you all about it."

He placed his arm under Red Weskit's, and half-guiding, half-dragging, took him straight away towards the little side-door that gave private entrance to the Great Hall. Mr. Foston pushed it open, and they entered.

At the upper end, under the grand stained-glass window, round the Principal, were ranged all the masters, and, mingled with them, a number of gentlemen of various ages, whose faces, in his confusion, Red Weskit seemed hazily to recognise. The centre of the hall was vacant; but along the sides and the further

end were the thronging clusters of the boys, drawn up in their classes, and bursting with eagerness. There was dead silence as the two entered, and Mr. Foston led old Peter up close to where sat Dr. Glover, who greeted both with a genial smile, as did indeed all in the group. The old man was quite dazed, and trembled a good deal at first; but a few kindly whispers from those around soothed him, and Dr. Glover asked him to sit down beside him. That, more than anything, restored him. Sit with the Principal! he would as soon have thought of—of—shall we say, of dancing a waltz with the Queen! So he stood upright in his usual position of respectful attention, and began to feel that he had, perhaps, been downcast about nothing, after all.

Then Dr. Glover rose and began to speak. He said: "Gentlemen and students of Kings Beeches, who are, and always will be, gentlemen, I hope; you are assembled here to-day to take part in a little ceremony—little in itself, and yet great because inspired by the really great qualities of affection, gratitude, and veneration—in a ceremony, then, which I rejoice to be called to preside over. All the gentlemen who so ably aid me in carrying out my duties, and most of the older pupils, are aware that there is a little club formed in London, the members of which go by the somewhat singular name (here some of the hearers began to laugh) of 'The Old Beeches,' in compliment to this old house of Kings Beeches, I presume, for it existed before my

time. Well, the members are all old scholars of this College, and I, for one, am sincerely glad to see so many of them round me this day. Mr. Foston is of course a member, and to him it first occurred that there was attached to, or rather a part and parcel of, this establishment, one man whose singular merits, uniform excellence, and admirable conduct throughout a long and most useful life, are as well known to him and all the 'Old Beeches,' as they are to myself and the masters of the College. That man is Peter Westcott!"

(Here there was a glorious burst of cheering from boys, masters, "Old Beeches," and every one, that rang through the lofty oaken rafters of the Hall till they shook again. When it had subsided, the Principal went on.)

"It also occurred to my friend, Mr. Foston, that this day was the fiftieth anniversary of Peter Westcott's entering this establishment—in fact, his jubilee—and that it should be marked by all sound 'Old Beeches' in a fitting manner. Through his brother (who is amongst you) he communicated with me, and hence, I believe, a little mystery arose that could not be avoided, as we wished to keep the matter secret. The 'Old Beeches' have begged of me to make the day as festive as possible for you students, and have also asked me to present to our trustworthy old friend, Peter Westcott (whom they intend presently to invite to dinner at the King's Rest), this handsome token of their affectionate

esteem for his admirable character manifested throughout a long life."

There was another tremendous outburst of cheering as Dr. Glover produced a handsome gold watch and rich chain from his pocket, and, with the most kindly expressions of sympathy and regard, placed it in the trembling hands of the thunder-struck old man. But it was nothing to the second cheer that was roared out when Dr. Glover went on, with a few more loving words, to present Red Weskit, on behalf of the Governors of the College, with the deeds of a pretty cottage and ample garden (within the Kings Beeches grounds), the lease of which had lately fallen in, to retire to whenever he liked. Then the old porter, in trying to utter a few words of thanks and gratitude, was fairly overcome; and seeing that the scene, through too great joy, was overpowering his old friend, Bob Foston again took him by the arm and led him away, followed by the loud huzzas of all assembled in the Great Hall.

After that, the "Old Beeches" came down amongst the fellows (for whom they had sent in no end of dainties for a first-rate dinner, and a dessert after it), and there was plenty of hand-shaking and joking and fun of all sorts, until at last a cry was raised that "the carriage has come!" and the whole troop scampered away into the playground, and round to the southern door, where there was a really first-rate turn-out standing, with four grey horses, and postilions all decked out with

flowers and ribbons, just as if they were going to a wedding. Presently Red Weskit, attired in his Sunday clothes, was led out smiling, happy, though not at all himself on account of the excitement, between Dr. Glover and Bob Foston, and was made to get into the carriage along with as many of the club as could possibly find a perch anywhere in or out—it didn't matter on such a jolly day—and the whole cavalcade went tearing up the tree-shaded avenue at a fine pace, followed by the cheers of all the boys and masters, and remaining Old Beeches too, till it disappeared over the brow of the hill, and went away to the King's Rest. The carriage came back as often as there were any of the members left, and, to the disgust of Trevor and a few sneaks but to the delight of all the rest, the last man, before getting in, in the very face of the Principal and all the masters, hove young Tom Foston and Hardbake in before him, and the whole lot were carried off to the banquet in Pitchcot.

After that the boys felt a little dull from the reaction, but they were speedily restored by being summoned to dinner, which turned out to be a glorious "spread." Later in the day they had dessert and wine; and, joy of joys! towards evening an enormous lot of fireworks were sent in, that the old fellows had ordered from London, and the night was the jolliest that had been known at Kings Beeches by any lad then there.

None of them are likely to forget in a hurry Old

Red Weskit's jubilee, that begun for him so miserably, and ended for all so joyously.

Of the banquet at the King's Rest, we need say nothing but that it was a jovial meeting of friends and schoolfellows to do honour to one whom they all loved and admired, and to whom they paid every possible honour and attention. Red Weskit recovered wonderfully under the pleasant influences around him of old friends—as all of them really were—whom he had tended and cared for when they were students of *his*, as he loved to say ; and he broke out very strong when the cloth was taken off the table and speech and song-time came on. For he could sing a rare good old song, could Red Weskit—aye, and make a rare good speech for the matter of that ; so that altogether they had a splendid time of it, and not one hitch of any kind occurred to disturb their serenity. Towards nightfall young Tom Foston and Hardbake were allowed to bolt off, to take part—and a large part, you may be sure, it was—in the firework fun ; and then the Old Beeches drew their chairs closer together, an enormous antique china bowl was introduced steaming with something “good for the inside,” pipes and cigars were lighted, and they began to talk about the old times at Kings Beeches, and the old chums that had dropped out of sight of one or other of those present. They all had plenty of stories, anecdotes, and histories to narrate of some of the former collegians ; while as there were men amongst them of nearly all ages—some of them

even nearly as old as Red Weskit himself—you may imagine what interesting tales of all sorts of years and about all sorts of places might have been heard that night in the big room at the King's Rest. But the best of all were, beyond a doubt, as every one agreed, told by Red Weskit; and for a good reason: he had watched the various boys as boys, had followed them studiously wherever he could—and through the agency of Old Beeches who were pretty constant visitors to their former college, he was able to follow their careers with considerable accuracy—as young, middle-aged, even elderly men; seeming indeed to be a walking history of the lives of those who had been most prominent for good, or, alas! for evil in some cases, during their schoolboy days. Even in instances, and they were but rare, where his memory did not serve him, he was able to refer to copious notes he had made, and on that account his reminiscences and experiences of how the Boy was really father to the Man, were as interesting as they were accurate.

During a pause, one of the ablest of the members, who amused himself occasionally with literary pursuits, thoughtfully remarked that Peter, if he chose, might furnish materials for a book at once entertaining and instructive for the boys of the present day; a book that should set forth incidents of the school days of some of the best, the middling, and the worst types he had known, so that the young reader might judge for himself how each character was likely to turn out in

later life ; that each such incident should be subsequently supplied with the true sequel as far as Peter or any of them knew it ; that thus might be impressed on the minds of all youths, the undoubted fact that the boy is not only the father, but is also, in a great measure, the tutor and self-preceptor of the future man. The idea was taken up with great eagerness by those present ; it was discussed in all its bearings ; and finally, it was resolved that the literary gentleman should remain at the King's Rest, or come down from time to time, to aid Peter, or rather to put down in proper form the old man's recollections ; and should then, with the countenance and support of the club of Old Beeches, publish the volume for the benefit and amusement of the rising generation.

The following stories are, therefore, the outcome of "Red Weskit's Mystification."





Story the First.

A BOLD STROKE FOR THE MASTERY.

CHAPTER I.

TRENTON'S PROPOSAL.

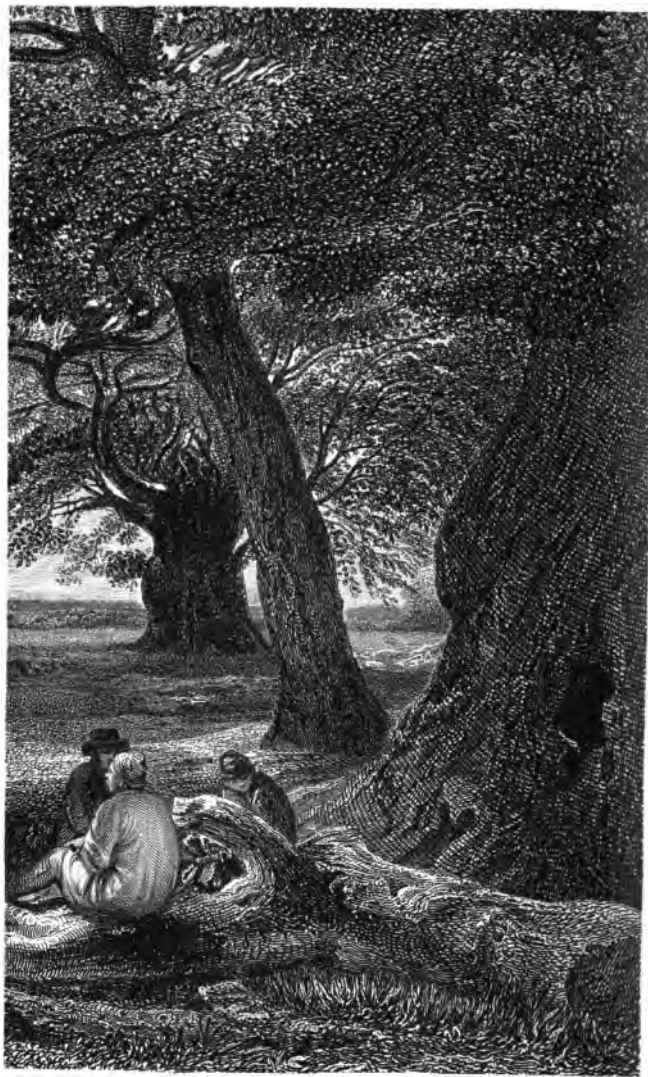
BUT it is!"

"But it isn't, I tell you. Old Purrett told me it was all to be cut up for firewood."

"What absurd nonsense! Just fancy," went on practical Jimmy Denvir, as he stood amidst a crowd of chaps who were watching the felling of some trees—"just fancy all that fine timber being used to light fires; why, it's worth a lot of money to a builder."

"If it was, where's there a builder here to buy it, I should like to know?" retorted Edgar Trenton, the other disputant, who was never ready to give in.

"Well, there's not much use squabbling over it,"



THE BEECH WALK.

put in another fellow ; " there's old Purrett himself, and the men coming back from dinner, and he'll settle the question in a brace of shakes."

The row arose over the thinning of the trees in the Beech Walk, one here and there being singled out for destruction, so as to give the younger growths more room, air, and light. It was a time of great fun for the lads, who were often allowed by Dr. King, the Principal at that time, to take a hand with the axe, provided they were strong enough, or to split up the stumps with wedges and mallet, or even with augur-bored gun-powder blasts, whose explosion caused no end of commotion and laughter, while an imaginary spice of danger lent them additional zest. All, old and young, were summoned to take a hand at the long ropes attached to the stems about two-thirds up, when hatchet and saw had done their work ; and then the game grew fast and furious, as with many a yell and scream, and sailors' " Yo ! Heave—ho ! " the whole school, almost, pulled together as one man till, with a mighty crash, the tree came thundering to the ground. Old Purrett was a sort of general handy-man on the Kings Beeches farm, and superintended all operations of this sort with special dignity, inasmuch as they gave him great opportunities for generalship and display of power over the others, before the " young gentlemen," as he called the scholars.

" I say, Purrett, aren't these trees for firewood ? " asked Trenton, eagerly. He hated being beaten, and

indeed very seldom did sustain defeat in anything he set his mind on.

Jimmy Denvir said nothing, but pointed significantly to some chalked measurements on one of the fallen trunks that Purrett himself had made in the morning from a builder's memorandum he had. The old man winked knowingly at Denvir before he answered Trenton.

"Ye're both right, young gemmen, and ye're both wrong too."

"Get out, you old Sikh!" cried Trenton, whose father was a colonel in the Indian Army, and just then engaged under Sir H. Hardinge in the war against the Sikh army; hence the word he used.

"How's that?" asked Jimmy Denvir, who was all for quiet information.

"Well, ye see, young gemmen," went on the old man, when he had set his hands to work and adjusted himself comfortably for his easy task of superintending—"ye see there's timber, and there's top and lop, and there's——"

"Do go on; you're drawling out your words as if you knew nothing about it!" burst in Jack Ivor, who was impatience embodied.

"There's top and lop, and there's stems, and there's rootses"—old Purrett was not to be put out by any one, so he went on all the slower for the interruption—"and the top and the lop, and the stéms and rootses, is sure enough for firewood; so Muster

Trenton is so far right ; but them trunks is for sawing up for old Dormer, the Buncombe builder ; so Muster Denvir's right too ; and yet, young gemmen, ye see ye were both wrong as well."

Trenton did not see that at all, and began to chaff the old fellow, who sat grimly smoking his pipe, and giving back just as hard-hitting jokes as he got. The other boys began to move about amongst the men, helping, interfering, hindering, and otherwise being in the way. But Jimmy Denvir sat down on some of the felled trunks to ploddingly think, as he was in the habit of doing, of all the possible uses the wood could be put to, or of all that might be gained from it. Presently the Principal strolled up, as he often did in the course of his afternoon walk, just to see how the work was going on, as well as to study with his keen mind the various characteristics of the boys under his control, in their unrestrained moments of leisure. For Dr. King was a noble gentleman in every action of his life, one who would never dream of undertaking a duty unless he intended to devote all the powers of his mind to it ; and as he had accepted his present office at Kings Beeches, he felt bound to make the character of each lad in it, as much as possible, a special study. He was no sneak or spy ; but he was far more frequently amongst his pupils than most Principals trouble themselves to be ; and that his intimacy was not misunderstood, or feared, was amply proved by the eagerness with which they crowded round him to

early education, and was therefore his inferior in position and power. The two had come to Kings Beeches together from India, where their parents were, and there was consequently no little jealousy between them because of the educational difference it had been found necessary to make in their classification.

"I don't think 'any fellow' could give a really good plan, Trenton," remarked the Doctor, who noticed the rivalry between the two; "and supposing he could, I do not see that I can make you a present of the timber to hack up into a wild man's wigwam; however, I will think about it, and consult Mr. Dauncey if I see my way to giving you permission to build what you want. When will your next public meeting be, Ivor?"

"This day week, sir," was the prompt answer of Ivor, who acted as secretary to the school club.

"Well, I will let you know then what Mr. Dauncey and I think about the affair;" and the Doctor resumed his walk until he was lost to view in the undulating and beautifully shaded grounds of grand old Kings Beeches.

At eight P.M. that day week the whole school was assembled in the large playroom to hold a "Public General Meeting," convened by the President—or "cock" of the school—to take into consideration all the rules, seasons, and general matters connected with the games for the coming summer. "Upper boys" had a portion of the Great Hall separated off for themselves, and sat there round a table in great

dignity. "Lower boys" were grouped on the benches and play-boxes in the other part of the room, making a great disturbance (as was their custom) by kicking with their heels against the panelling, until the "constables" came round with knotted pocket-handkerchiefs and soon restored something like order. Then the President got up to make a speech, and after that the ordinary business was rapidly but accurately transacted, every dubious question being put to the vote either of "Upper boys" or of "Lower boys," or of both combined, according as the revised rules of the school demanded. Then the President rose again, and said he had a communication to read from Dr. King that concerned them all; and though the idea had emanated from "Lower boys," "Upper boys" were in this instance quite prepared to waive their rights and help the thing on the best way they could. He then read out the Principal's letter, which gave his own and Mr. Dauncey's approval to the scheme Trenton had propounded for building a temporary tent until the funds of the cricket club would allow of the purchase of a marquee or "Pavilion" — which, of course, appeared much more the "right thing" to all, both big and little — and the two gentlemen further consented to give any timber that might be needful from that which had been cut down in the Beech Walk. There was a loud cheer at this result of the talk of the previous week, and the constables had to rush round, wielding vigorously their weapons of

office before they could enforce the silence needful for the President to proceed with Dr. King's letter. "But," that document went on to say, "we find it necessary that a neat and substantial plan—one that will look tolerably well, and will not fall to pieces in the first storm—should be provided for our inspection and approval; and therefore, to stimulate the talent and energy which we feel sure must exist somewhere in the school, we give our consent only on the condition that such a plan must be drawn out by one of yourselves—be thrown open, in fact, to the competition of all of you—and at the end of a fortnight we shall select three from those submitted to us, and out of the three you may choose and build accordingly for yourselves."

There was another loud cheer at the conclusion of the letter—a cheer so loud and so prolonged that the constables were quite unable to restore order, and the meeting broke up in some confusion, after a hurried announcement from the President that all plans were to be sent in to him during the ensuing week or ten days.

CHAPTER II.

A STORMY MEETING.

THERE are three good libraries at the old school—one of a very superior class for masters, one for Upper boys, and one for Lower boys. To the former there is, of course, no admittance for the students, unless it be for those well advanced in the higher classes, who require works of a more abstruse character than are to be found on their own shelves ; the second one is a comfortably-fitted-up apartment, with plenty of good sound literature, and an ample supply of works of reference ; and the third, or lowest, also contains most excellent books, but of a more juvenile nature than the one above, and also boasts a fair allowance of useful works, such as are likely to instruct while interesting growing youths.

Since the announcement made at the general meeting that the plan for the cricketing hut was to be open for competition by all, there had been a regular rush to the two latter libraries for all the books that could give the slightest hints as to architecture—that science being, in the minds of most of the fellows, the one required to meet the case in point. At first every one, of any ability or energy, made up his mind to draw out a plan and send it in, nothing doubting that

his, and his only, would be the most acceptable to the Principal, Mr. Dauncey, and finally to the boys themselves. So the shelves and bookcases were ransacked; models of all sorts, from palaces down to Irish cabins, were studied and copied; materials the most fit, unfit, and generally incongruous, were thought of and suggested—marble, granite, bricks, split-rails, and even wattle-and-dab—none of them were neglected; while the most famous builders of both ancient and modern palaces, mansions, &c., were freely selected and copied from. For a day or two the whole school was in a ferment—drawing paper and materials; plain paper and stumps of bitten-down pencils; whitey-brown and chalk, with burnt sticks for shading purposes; even hard and stiff pasteboard, with brick-dust and yellow clay—all went up to a premium, and more rubbish and litter, with coloured dirt of all sorts, was left in the play and schoolrooms each night than had ever been known before by “the oldest inhabitant.” But presently the excitement began to abate; fellows got tired of bungling over impossible things that they did not understand; black fingers, smudged faces, and spoilt clothes reduced the ardour of the lazy or the ultra-cleanly; some cynics laughed at all the efforts that were being made as absurd nonsense that would end in smoke; and finally, most of the competitors threw up the whole affair in real or affected disgust, leaving the plan to the rivalry of some dozen lads of either decided architectural proclivities, or of such useful and plodding natures

as would thanklessly work on at the problem of squaring the circle, if they were only well assured that that feat could be really accomplished.

"You'll have it to yourself soon, Jimmy," remarked Ivor, entering the Upper library one day when Denvir, surrounded by a pile of books, plans, pencils and paints, was working away at a really excellent scheme he had conceived and was elaborating with great care.

"Why?" he asked, raising his head, and passing his hand across his brow, as one does when suffering from headache.

"Because all the other classes are chucking up, right and left. Why, Tom Boxer tore his sketch into bits just now, and said he wouldn't bother any more about it."

"What a stupid fellow!" quietly remarked the other; "and after all the pains he took, too."

"Steam ahead, James!" cried a boisterous admirer of Denvir's, who was sitting watching his progress; "steam ahead, and you must win. There's none of them can come near you either in the thinking and planning, or in the drawing either!"

"No, not one of 'em," put in another; "Jimmy's *the* man!"

Denvir looked just a trifle flattered by these praises of his friends, but only a trifle; for he was a modest boy, with but a poor opinion of his own abilities, and trusted far more to his power of work and industry than to any cleverness. Yet he was clever in his way

—a real practical cleverness that made him stick to one subject, and make himself thoroughly up in that before he turned to another; a cleverness, be it remarked, that produces far more men of note and eminence than that harum-scarum mere brain power that can attain a certain degree of proficiency in everything tried, but never reaches the top rank in anything, for the good reason that application is wanting. So Jimmy Denvir stuck to his scheme, and spared neither time nor labour to make it first-rate. His friends—indeed all who closely examined it—said it *must* succeed, it was so complete and elaborate in every part; while one sporting youngster went so far as to stake half a week's pocket-money on the result—a betting feat that was overheard by a junior master, and earned for its originator a pretty smart imposition.

And all this time Edgar Trenton was absolutely doing nothing, to the great disgust of the many followers he could boast, and of those admirers who had heard him making the boast in the Beech Walk about “any fellow” being able to produce a good plan. Of course he hadn't admission to Upper boys' library; but there were lots of books in the Lower one that would have answered his purpose, and yet he never took a single one of them down; indeed he read nothing whatever during the whole time but “Robinson Crusoe” and other works of travel and adventure, and never even drew as much as the gable-end of a pigstye! Naturally his friends were disgusted

with his conduct; for they had all made up their minds that he would uphold the honour of Lower boys by drawing a "clipping" good hut, with proper elevations and all the rest of it, and now it looked as if he was going to throw them over.

"'Pon my word it's too bad of you, Trenton," grumbled out Jack Denson, one of his best and fastest friends, "to let us be licked in this way by a stupid ass like that Jimmy Denvir; it is indeed."

"How d'ye know we'll be licked?"

"How do I know? How does anybody know? Why, you've not drawn a line of a house yet, so we must be beaten."

"Don't you be too sure of that, Jack. When are the blessed things to go before the Chief?"

"One—two—well, the third evening from this is the latest—the very last chance."

Edgar muttered something that was not very consoling to honest Jack Denson in his sorrow at the disgrace he expected to fall on his friend as well as on all Lower boys, and strolled off to the Beech Walk, where he carelessly, and yet with a curious eye, looked at the now roughly-sawn-up timber that was waiting to be manufactured into a cricket-house.

"Ah!" sighed out Jack Denson, who was watching his movements from the end of the ball-alley, "ah! he has given it up as a bad job; just see how he is shaking his head!" And Jack looked as miserable as a puppy about to receive its first cold bath. From that time

Trenton's plan was never spoken of, save as a good joke by Upper boys, while with Lowers his reputation as a sort of second "cock" began rapidly to decline, in spite of the affection and admiration he had previously enjoyed amongst them.

But they were all wrong. Along with some half-dozen others, Edgar Trenton sent in his plan; but no one in the whole school had seen it, nor could even his most intimate "chums" imagine when, where, or how he had managed to draw it out and write the descriptive matter that had to be sent in with each scheme. But in it certainly did go; and what was more, it was one of the three selected by the Principal and Mr. Dauncey out of which the school were to select whichever they liked best; the other two belonging respectively to Jimmy Denvir and "Jumping" Lorton, both being Upper boys.

. Lower boys were in high delight at the success of their favourite and leader, and even gruff Jack Denson went crazy over it—cutting such capers, when he heard the good news, as made him more akin to an ourang-outang (the only kind of monkey to which he could be compared) than to a sober, well-conducted pupil at Kings Beeches. For the next few days there was a good deal of commotion observable amongst Upper boys. Chats, discussions, confabulations of all sorts were being held in all kinds of places, their own library being the one most affected; and at last it got mooted about that "Jumping" (so called from his saltatory

powers) Lorton's scheme had been put on one side as unfit, and that Jimmy Denvir's was the one to be used.

"Oh, that's all very fine!" hotly cried Jack Denson on hearing the news; but *we* must have something to say in the choice. Who are Uppers, I should like to know, that they should make us do just what they want? Let the President call a general public meeting and put it fairly to the vote."

This proposition was received with acclamation by the malcontents amongst Lower boys; but the Uppers would not hear of such a thing, and their power was, of course, next to supreme in the school. They said, and with truth, that according to the rules of the school, which had been handed down during many generations of scholars, the President had no power to call a meeting for such a matter; that if one was called, its vote would bind nobody; and finally, it would be only a waste of time, as the great majority would vote for Denvir's plan.

"Let him call one, then, and see!" burst in Trenton, Denson, and a lot of other fellows; and the President, who was rather a weak-minded "trimmer" than anything else, did call one accordingly. Both sides set eagerly to work canvassing for votes, and the "dodges" and schemes employed were quite equal to any at a Parliamentary election, so great was the excitement. When the eventful evening came, both sides were quite confident of success—so confident, in fact, that they actually allowed the Pre-

sident to make one of his favourite speeches without interruption of any sort. They were husbanding their resources for the row they well knew was coming. Jimmy Denvir's plan was placed on the table—Lorton's did not appear at all—where Upper boys sat, and a copy of it was ostentatiously stuck up on the wall in the very midst of Lowers. Edgar Trenton held his (which had been returned to him as useless) in his right hand, which grasped it firmly, while his set teeth and determined-looking face showed that he was prepared to go to all lengths rather than not attain his end. Denvir was called upon first to explain his drawings, and he did so modestly and yet confidently, but with an elaboration of detail and *minutiae* that became in time wearying. He gave all the particulars of everything: the sinking of the corner and supporting posts; the laying down of a regular raised flooring that was to be dug under; the different rooms and compartments, all of sound solid work; the off-chambers for bats, stumps, &c.; the dressing-rooms; the scorer's particular box; in fact, the whole plan, elevation, and belongings of a regular cricketing house after the most approved London pattern. That the scheme was an excellent one in every respect, there could be no possible means of denying, and when Denvir sat down the cheering was of a most enthusiastic description, while nearly every one felt that it was quite impossible to improve on the plan.

Edgar Trenton's idea proved to be a very simple one, and was taken chiefly from the "Robinson Crusoe" sort of literature he had been indulging in while the other fellows were pottering uselessly over architects' designs. A light open framework, without any flooring whatever; a verandah of still lighter materials running round the three sides that would be nearest the cricket ground; a roof of shingles and interwoven branches, with a few shelves, racks, and other places for storing the necessaries of the game—all of the simplest construction, but elegant and graceful withal—made up the whole affair, which was as different from Jimmy Denvir's as a labourer's cottage is from the squire's mansion.

"That is my idea," said Trenton, at the end; "and I think it is a very good one, and just what we want," he added, in a determined tone of voice.

A shout of laughter from Upper boys greeted his words, and even no small portion of his own following joined in the merriment. Then a jolly row ensued: some wanted a vote taken; some said it was ridiculous; others yelled for mere yelling's sake; and a fourth party endeavoured, but without the slightest success, to abate the uproar. The President tried to take a vote, but the turmoil confused him; first he counted one way, then another, then a third; he made contradictory statements of the results, he began to count again, until a determined rush was made by Jack Denson and the other malcontents. They overturned Upper

boys' table (receiving many a black eye and damaged nose in the affray); a rough-and-tumble struggle ensued; most of the gas-burners were turned out, and the meeting broke up in anger and dismay.

CHAPTER III.

PALMAM QUI MERUIT FERAT.

AND what are we to do *now*?" asked Jack Ivor, at the first play-time the next day, to a group of Uppers who assembled in their own library, every one declaring he dropped in by "mere chance," to discuss the affair of the previous night.

"I am sure *I* don't know," dreamily replied the feeble-minded President, who was heartily sick of the whole affair.

"Stick to our guns, of course!" put in Tom Boxer, who was of nautical tastes. His advice was taken, and, after a good deal of discussion, it was determined that the site should be chosen that very day, the ground marked out, the available tools belonging to the fellows collected and put in order, others borrowed, begged, or purchased, and that vigorous action should prove to both the medium and bottom classes that the Uppers were not to be so easily put down as some of them might think. The Uppers were quite well aware of the real power they had over the remaining two-thirds of the school, and they were quite determined on this occasion to put forth all their strength to maintain it in its integrity.

But it must not be supposed that Loweres were going

to let them have all their own way. Trenton, Jack Denson, and other leaders took good care of that. They kept up the excitement that prevailed at the meeting : nay, they even increased it as far as possible, both by individual efforts with waverers, as well as by constant boastings and public demonstrations on every possible occasion. Yet there were lots and lots of their own proper party—or what they were pleased to call by that name—who could not be got by any means to declare decidedly against Upper boys ; while a fair proportion openly avowed their intention of sticking to the guidance of their elders ; and consequently Edgar Trenton found himself in a decided minority. He did not, however, lose heart on that account ; on the contrary, opposition only braced up his nerves to fight and overcome it ; his strong will and determination came into full play ; he felt perfectly confident that his plan was the best in every respect ; and he cheered on his few adherents to support him through thick and thin.

“ ‘Jove, those fellows *are* going ahead !” cried out Jack Denson the same afternoon, when the Uppers and their following went in a body to the cricket ground, and commenced, after settling on the site pointed out by Jimmy Denvir, to peg out the lines on which his house was to be erected.

“ Let them, if it amuses them,” quietly answered Trenton ; “ we can do the same, I suppose.”

And they did do the same, for they at once proceeded

1. The first group of people who are interested in the study of the history of the United States are the people who are interested in the history of the United States.

[illegible]

The President went to Dr. King to ask for the materials, and he agreed to return that Denver's plan was the best.

...the Doctor, with a

position—but

to interfere;

but remember, there is only *one* hut to be built—you must decide the thing entirely amongst yourselves.”

The President retired rather more confused than before; but Ivor, Boxer, Denvir, and the others looked upon the Doctor's decision as an excellent one for their party; resolved to keep it secret; and set to work the next day to dig out the foundations. They did so, removing first all the sods, to get rid of the bad lines that had been tampered with; and at the end of the day the Lowers, who still stuck to Trenton, began to feel that they were completely outflanked and beaten. Their consternation became “worse confounded” when the evening post came in, bearing a letter for Trenton, summoning him to Southampton to meet his mother, who had arrived from India sooner than had been expected. Even Jack Denson feared that “all was up,” and hardly believed Trenton, who whispered him, when wringing his hand in a warm “goodbye,” to keep up his pluck, and they would win in the end.

When Edgar Trenton returned at the end of a week—his mother, who was very delicate, having been ordered at once to the South of France—he found Jimmy Denvir's foundations almost completed, and the whole thing making rapid progress under the enforced labour of all the lads who were thought to be of any use.

“Not that they get very much out of *me*,” grimly added Jack Denson, when he told his friend how things

were going. "I do a deal more harm than good, and flatter myself I have kept back their dirty job by two or three days; but I say, Tren, they'll put you on to-morrow."

"*Will* they? I don't think they will!"

"Then they'll thrash you if you don't."

"Thrash away. I'll not work for them, not I; you just see if I do, Jack."

He said no more that night, and Jack had to repress his curiosity, and bide his time.

"Now, then, bear a hand!" said Tom Boxer at first play-time the following morning, when Trenton and nearly all the school—somehow, a row was expected—had assembled to watch the works.

"Not I!" was the firm, simple answer.

"Don't press him," broke in Jimmy Denvir, anxiously; "it's not fair, as his plan was so nearly carried."

"But we will, though," cried Ivor and Boxer; while a lot of Uppers rushed towards Trenton.

He snatched up a heavy wooden mallet, jumped hastily into a rectangular corner formed by some piled planking, and on to an overturned chest that stood there. "The first fellow that lays his hands on me, I'll break his head for him!" he shouted, looking the while as determined as a lion at bay.

There was no mistaking the fierce, fearless, utterly immovable glance that fired out from his bold eyes. The Uppers were fairly taken aback; it was not fear

exactly, but they *knew* that he would carry out his threat, and the boldest felt they had no right to push matters to an extremity that *must* lead to dangerous mischief. Trenton saw his opportunity, and, keeping his eyes still firmly fixed on the leaders of the Uppers, he began to address the crowd of all ranks who had gathered round. He pointed out—what had never struck any one before—the absurdity of Jimmy Den-vir's plan; showing plainly that it was, however good in itself—and he gave it hearty and full praise—far too solid and lasting for what they wanted; that it was a permanent, not a temporary, erection; that it would cost the club so much in tools, nails, &c., as to prevent them buying their marquee for two or three seasons more; and, finally, that it would take them at least two, if not three, months to complete, and by that time the season would be nearly over. His powerful, earnest, and evidently truthful words began to have a marked effect; and when he went on to prove that his temporary hut would look well, would be very comfortable and answer every purpose, would cost next to nothing, was, in fact, exactly what they wanted just for one season, and, moreover, could be easily run up in a fortnight, the number of waverers began to rapidly increase, and by the time he had finished it was quite evident he had achieved a decided victory. But it was not to be expected that Uppers were going to give in like that; they withdrew to a little distance to discuss what was to be done next—a move that Trenton

and Denson took immediate advantage of to strengthen their cause by powerful arguments, and they had just determined to make a rush and a fight for it, when the great bell rang out, and all had to adjourn to studies.

Violent rain set in that afternoon, and continued without tangible intermission for three days, so that no further work could be done, and the question of forcing Trenton to help at Jimmy Denvir's house remained in abeyance. Both sides tried to improve the occasion by beating up recruits, organizing their several parties, and marshalling their forces for a renewed battle. Uppers felt very confident in their cause; they relied on their prestige, and on the Doctor's implied consent; while Loweres worked steadfastly and most energetically to laugh down the idea of building a sort of permanent cricketing house, that could not possibly be ready for the fast-approaching season, when all had set their hearts on the purchase of a tent as being the most proper thing for the game. Trenton and Denson were unremitting in their efforts to gain over supporters to their cause, but they had to encounter immense opposition, as well from the natural conservatism of boys—who generally listen with the greatest attention to the worn-out argument, "Oh! it was always so!"—as from the great strength and power the "upper ten thousand" in a school have, and always will have, over the minds of lads who are either their fags or look to their seniors for help, advice, and good things of all

sorts. Still there was an evident growing idea—but, be it said, of very tardy growth—that Trenton's party was in the right; sensible fellows could not possibly get over the arguments he used on the absurdity of Jimmy Denvir's plan; and the two sides were far more evenly balanced than the Uppers thought on the morning that the rain ceased, and it became evident that work could be resumed.

It was a half-holiday, and almost every lad at Kings Beeches made, the moment dinner was over, for the scene of action. The Uppers, with their adherents, recommenced at once where they had left off on the house. Trenton and Denson strolled up last of all, and were at once bid to take up tools and set to work.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," was Trenton's firm answer, as he folded his arms with a smile of contempt.

"Neither shall I!" repeated Jack Denson, looking round perhaps just a little nervously, to see what support was at hand.

The Uppers threw down their tools, and gathered round Tom Boxer, who had shouted out, "Then we'll make you!"

Trenton gave a loud shout. "Now, my lads!" he cried, and he, Denson, and a score of the strongest Lowers, made a rush at the tools the others had thrown down.

"Thus perish tyrants' folly!" cried Trenton, felling with an axe at one blow a stout post that had

been erected to mark one of the corners. The Lowers had possession of all the tools; the Uppers dared not come near them; the waverers at once joined the triumphant party with heart and will; and in less than half-an-hour the whole work was utterly uprooted and destroyed. Some of the Uppers showed fight determinedly, and more than one fierce struggle went on between the leaders on both sides; but the Uppers soon perceived that they were hopelessly beaten—all the rest of the school turned against them, and at last they gave up the contest in despair, and walked away in a body.

“A bold stroke for the mastery—eh, Jack?” said Trenton, with some pride, as he felt he was the conqueror in a rightful cause, and he may be excused the boast on account of the rather unfair treatment he had received in the competition.

Somehow or another—not a few lads held that Red Weskit saw it was then the right time to interfere—Dr. King got to hear of the whole affair, and he ordered the President to hold another “public general meeting,” and take a proper vote of the whole school. There was no gainsaying that order—rules or no rules—and the decision was nearly unanimously in favour of Edgar Trenton’s temporary hut, which was commenced the next day, and successfully finished before the time appointed for commencing the cricket season. Jimmy Denvir bore no malice whatever, and when, after a most successful time of it in playing matches, &c., with

other clubs, the school broke up for the vacation, nearly all the old wounds were healed, and peace and unanimity restored amongst the then scholars of Kings Beeches.

On the completion of his education, Edgar Trenton went out to Bombay as a cadet of the East India Company. He displayed always great quickness and energy, with a readiness for grasping the true state of affairs, and was specially noted for skill and aptitude in bringing men of wild race and temper under his control. In process of time he was employed to raise a corps of cavalry from amongst the men of an almost savage tribe in Central India, and the history and services of "Trenton's Horse" are written in the records of the fearful Mutiny of 1857 in terms of the highest praise. Trenton is now a colonel, and wears on his breast a well-fought-for-and-earned Victoria Cross.

Jimmy Denvir may be seen almost any day down Westminster way. He has splendid offices and a large staff of assistants in Victoria Street; and his name as a most excellent, careful, and eminently trustworthy engineer, is well known all over England.





THE INN AT PITCHCOT.





Story the Second.

THE TUG OF WAR!



CHAPTER I.

“Excursions and Alarums.”

SHAKESPEARE.

AT one time Kings Beeches was at open and declared war with Pitchcot. We do not now allude to the contest, lasting from generation to generation, between the Principal and Masters of the College and the inhabitants of that anything but highly moral or decorous village; that was a quarrel of good against evil, commencing the very first season a school was opened, existing with greater or lesser intensity through a long course of years, and likely, we hope, to continue until such time as Pitchcot shall become virtuous, or the Kings Beeches establishment be broken up—which last, Heaven forefend! The reason of that per-

manent dispute was to be found in the desire of the idle, loafing, poaching portion of the villagers to extract money from the pockets of the students by leading them into all sorts of mischief, and in the constant endeavour of the authorities to prevent such contamination. The war we refer to now was a special and occasional one between the boys and the clowns, arising out of some disputed rights of nutting, birdsnesting, and blackberrying, and was waged with great energy and acrimony on both sides. The village youths had made a sudden raid in the early spring on grounds famous for birds' nests, that was supposed by the collegians to belong to them solely, and these grounds were speedily denuded of all their treasures. Kings Beeches was not going to stand this outrage without revenge ; accordingly some of the boors were waylaid and soundly thrashed. Reprisals on behalf of the Pitchcotians were actively engaged in ; small boys, or detached parties, were kidnapped and ducked in the slimy pond on the extensive green lying at one side and towards the back of the village ; an attack in force was made on the green by the enraged Beeches—geese were pelted unmercifully, pigs were driven into the open and hunted for miles, the cows going home to milk were stoned, and the donkeys seized upon and employed as light cavalry against their own masters. Naturally this roused the ire of the grown-up young men, who flew to the rescue of the village lads, and a regular battle was the result. The Pitchcotians were heavier and

stronger, but the Beeches were far more numerous, more skilled, more active, and—a most important item—more quick at running away; the result was that with their superior organization, and guerilla system of only making an actual attack when in overpowering force, and rapidly retreating when outnumbered, they had far the best of it in the campaign as a rule. But the enemy had advantages that could not be denied, with opportunities of harassing the foe that the restricted hours of the schoolfellows prevented their coping with. The former came down at night, cut up and utterly destroyed the best-laid-out portions of the cricket-field; they wrecked completely the hut referred to in the record preceding this one; and they seized, carried away, or utterly destroyed any implements, play appurtenances, or other materials of amusement or occupation that they could lay their hands on by night or day. When nutting and blackberrying time came round, the clowns were specially active; they were indefatigable in scouring the country-side in advance of the Beeches, clearing off every ripe berry and nut, and destroying those that had not come to maturity, Sundays as well as weekdays being freely devoted to the purpose. Even the places actually on the lands of Kings Beeches were not sacred, so that it is no exaggeration to say that where the Beeches in former years got a thousand nuts, this year of the war they got but one! No amount of mere pummellings of detached boors, no

hunting of pigs, stoning of geese and cows, or stealing of donkeys (though all such forays were carried out with immense spirit and enterprise) could compensate for this last outrage, and the Beeches were, in this sort of campaigning, as completely worsted as they were successful in actual attacks on the Pitchcotians.

In those days there were at Kings Beeches two boys of decided martial proclivities. Their talents for the art of war, though of about equal value, were of a very different nature; for while Ned Turville was noted for the blind, reckless, unconquerable tenacity of daring of the English bulldog, Eustace Poulton was distinguished for a cool, calm, brain-directed courage that would dare all, but dare it in well-considered and well-planned methods of attack. In other respects also they were of about equal attainments, belonged to the same class in Uppers, lodged in the same room in Grecian's Grove (this, however, only for a very short time, as for obvious reasons they were soon separated); were about the same age, height, and weight; but in the question of muscle Turville was as superior as Poulton was in brain power. From the first day these two entered the College (they entered together) they had engaged in battle. As very little chaps they were pitted the one against the other by some of the Uppers then resident, who should have known better, had kept up the warfare with great gusto on their own account, and were now, as Uppers themselves, just as often as not to be found enjoying a scientific round or two to pass off an unoc-

cupied half hour. There was now little bitterness or malice in their contests; they had, like gladiators, been made to fight as children; they retained the habit in boyhood; and now that they were slowly turning into hobbledehoys, they maintained the custom for their own amusement. But though they fought one another, high and low, on the slightest provocation, they were always ready to join their forces against any common enemy, so that at the present juncture their almost invaluable services were freely, and without the slightest jealousy, marshalled side by side against the village clowns with the greatest possible effect.

Soon after the outbreak of the war in the spring, Eustace Poulton, a very Von Moltke in far-seeing strategy, had, in addition to many feats of brilliant generalship in every instance successful, planned out an autumn campaign, the details of which he very wisely kept to himself until the time came when it was necessary to take what might be called the chief of his staff into his confidence. In the first place, he managed to obtain the consent of the leading Uppers and of the Principal—the necessary negotiations with the latter had, of course, to be most delicately conducted, so that Dr. Trevor might have no suspicion that anything out of the ordinary was intended—to an alteration in the holding of a great annual College holiday—Doctor's Day it was called*—from summer-time to the day of

* This annual holiday was given in honour of the Principal, and was sometimes kept on his birthday, sometimes on any date that was

the Pitchcot Club Feast, which latter was always celebrated on a fixed date in the late autumn. He next started a subscription list, bearing the imposing title of "The Pitchcot Attack Secret Service Fund," heading it himself with a munificent donation of half a sovereign, and inducing most of the Uppers to put down their names for optional amounts. But subscription to the list on the part of Lovers was by no means so optional; they were not actually forced to subscribe their sixpences or shillings as their means would allow, but there was a sort of moral compulsion used that was far more effectual, so that the aforesaid coins came in to the fund in very considerable numbers. Grumblers there were of course—plenty of them too—who "wanted to know, you know," what all this collection was specifically for; but they were very speedily hushed or cried down by the vast majority, who placed implicit confidence in the generalship of Eustace Poulton, firmly believing, indeed, that the money was being got together for the purchase of muskets, pistols, or even cannon, to be employed in due time against the insulting walls of Pitchcot! Poulton only grinned sardonically when this *canard* from Lovers reached his ears; he was not at all one to be induced to disclose his real plans because false or outrageous ones were attributed to him, so he only found most convenient. The chief difference between it and other holidays consisted in the boys being allowed out of bounds *ad libitum*, being treated to a specially good dinner, and being allowed fire-works in the evening.

pocketed the money in silence while giving directions as to smart operations (for the most part commanded and carried out under the personal superintendence of Ned Turville) being constantly maintained against the Pitchcotians.

"*Delenda est Pitchcotia !*" sternly cried Eustace Poulton, parodying the celebrated words of M. Portius Cato regarding Carthage, one night when an animated discussion arose in the great playroom on a defeat the Beeches had just sustained at the hands of the enemy ; and from that time out the more credulous of Lowers were more convinced than ever that Pitchcot was to be attacked with real weapons and levelled or burned to the ground ! The Uppers, some of whom had by this time a very shrewd idea of their general's plans, laughed, but did not discourage the idea ; and little boys sometimes on dark or windy nights crept quietly from their beds to look out of the windows, expecting to see a great glare in the sky from the flames that were consuming Pitchcot.

All this time the villagers were, of course, in complete ignorance of the projects that were being nurtured against them, confining themselves to acts of hostility whenever occasion offered without giving their attacks any great thought or previous deliberation. They harried the enemy's country with great but rude vigour, and as long as their forays created visible and patent annoyance or damage to their foes they were quite content, until the next suc-

cessful attack of Ned Turville and Eustace Poulton taught them that they were not to have things all their own way.

So the year wore on, until it became tolerably near the day of the Club Feast, when all hostilities suddenly and tacitly were suspended : on the part of the Clowns, because they were engaged in active preparations for holding their annual festivities and sports ; on the part of the Beeches, by order of Eustace Poulton, who desired (as part of his plan) to lull his opponents into a false sense of security, and a belief that, now the nutting season was over, the College boys were willing to let bygones be bygones, and to enter Pitchcot as harmlessly as formerly for trading purposes of a more or less illicit nature. For three weeks or a month this pleasant state of affairs lasted ; and though Ned Turville, with some of his bulldogs, growled horribly at the unwonted inaction, they were forced by the weight of public opinion to resign themselves to Poulton's decree, and lie down most unwilling lambs beside the lions of Pitchcot. Now, Pitchcot Feast was known throughout the whole country-side as being the very best and jolliest that was to be found in Coastshire ; one where there were more numerous prizes to be competed for than at any other, greater diversity of sports, and consequently better chances for outsiders distinguishing themselves and carrying away substantial rewards in money, or goods of the leg-of-mutton class ; for most of the athletic contests—such as racing of every sort, climbing

the greasy pole, boxing, wrestling, throwing the cricket-ball, jumping, "putting" a weight, &c., &c.—were open to public competition, and any one that chose might come forward on paying a small entrance-fee. Part of "General" (for so he began to be called) Poulton's plan was, after the Pitchcot Feast programme was published, by degrees unfolded. With a view (as publicly announced to Red Weskit, the house servants, and the farm labourers, who were sure to spread the tidings to Pitchcot itself) to put an end to the contests that had been going on, and that were now at an end for the year, and to restore the good feeling that had formerly subsisted, it was resolved that a few of the Uppers should, as had always been the case, enter some of the Feast competitions, thus holding out once more the hand of friendship, and proving that all malice was at an end. But Red Weskit noticed with no little curiosity that many more lads than usual went into training, that a great deal more time was devoted than was at all customary to practising for the sports, and that even some of the Loweres were being drilled and instructed, with a view to their entering for some of the junior prizes. Red Weskit found himself quite unable to account for this novel state of things, but his curiosity was destined to remain unsatisfied until the *dénouement* came about, for the simple reason that "General" Poulton had sworn his adherents to profound secrecy.

CHAPTER II.

“War, war! No peace—peace is to me a war!”

SHAKESPEARE.

“WELL, of all the stupid mulls I ever knew, this is the stupidest,” growled out a Lower (Dick Mandril) as he was standing outside the playroom door on the glorious morning that ushered in the Doctor’s Day.

“Why?” asked Watty Royle, a friend of the last speaker’s standing in the school.

“Why? just fancy having Doctor’s Day on the same day the louts are having their Club Feast; we shall be bored with country bumpkins coming on the cricket-ground to stare at us all day long!”

“Well, that won’t hurt you, will it? A cat may look at a king, and for my part I think it will be awfully jolly; for we shall have much more time on a whole play-day to see the wrestling and fun, instead of pounding away at cricket all the time. I am sick of it, and we should give it up long before so late as this.”

“Pooh! you Molly-Coddle, you always hate cricket.”

“Molly-Coddle yourself! I ain’t such——”

“Now, then, don’t you fellows be kicking up that row there,” ordered Eustace Poulton, joining the group. “I want to pick out the fellows for the different races,” which he proceeded to do from a carefully annotated

list of their recent performances which he held in his hand. After that, the champions who were to compete—and they were a goodly number—in the various club contests were selected, and the revised list sent up to the bumpkin who acted as secretary to the village sports. All the morning was then devoted to practising the various games, putting the finishing touches on the performances of those chosen, and giving hints to those who were not quite up to the mark. The dinner (for the most part at the expense of the Principal) was as excellent and profuse as on any previous Doctor's Day, and a double allowance of beer was enthusiastically received, as being calculated to infuse greater skill, endurance, and courage into the persons of those who were to compete with the louts. After that, an adjournment took place to the Beech Walk, the shady side of the Ball Alley, and other favourite haunts, to wait until half-past two, when it would be time to go up to Pitchcot to join in the games. During that interval the Uppers made, as usual, all arrangements amongst themselves as to the fireworks, large boxes of which had come down from London the previous day, and were stored in an outhouse, which would be distributed and let off, according to custom, when dusk had set in.

Exact to the moment mentioned on the Pitchcot programme, the greater part of the Kings Beeches boys marched on to the capacious village-green, taking up their position in a tolerably compact body on the side

more remote from the cottages, none of which lay very near. The green was covered with shows, circuses, and all the usual paraphernalia of a fair: merry-go-rounds, swings, giants' strides, with all sorts of machines for pleasurable locomotion, were in abundance; boxing and wrestling booths were very numerous; while the refreshment-tents and huts were plentifully sprinkled all over the place—indeed there were about four of such places to every one devoted to amusement—and all were doing a roaring trade in every sort of meat and drink, but more especially in the latter. Considerable crowds of clowns were enjoying all the fun the Feast afforded, though the “ladies” were not nearly so numerous as they would be at a later hour in the evening, when the dancing-booths would be much fuller than they were just now. The secretary of the club, Joe Bodgett by name, came plodding up to where Poulton, Turville, and others of the school leaders were standing.

“I suppose, gemmen,” he said, with a half-awkward, half-comical sort of grin on his distended features, “I suppose there ain’t agoing to be no foites like betwixt you and our youngsters?”

“Not likely,” answered Poulton, “unless they begin it; there’s nothing left to quarrel about now. But we won’t promise not to give it them well if they do begin; we don’t care about their carrying on the games they have been up to this year.”

“There’s a splendid evasive answer for you!” whis-

pered Ned Turville in the ear of his next neighbour. Ned never bore the slightest malice to his frequent opponent in fisticuffs, but rather had a high appreciation of his talents as a diplomatist. Mr. Bodgett grinned from ear to ear :

“Give it ’em well! I like that, measter. Whoi, they du tell me they allus wolopped ye well, whensoever, leastways, that ye would stand and foite!”

“Walopped us?” “Indeed!” “Like to see them do it!” “The clumsy lubbers lick us!” and suchlike indignant remarks burst out in a chorus from the Beeches, as they burned in their ranks to be led again to battle. Poulton quieted them with a few words in an under-tone.

“Stand and ‘foite,’ Mr. Bodgett,” he went on, “we have done, and we shall do again. Don’t be too proud. We shall do much better in future against your young blusterers—you just see if we don’t—if they give cause. But let us drop that,” he changed his tone to one of ordinary business discussion; “we are at peace just now, and have come to join your sports. When are you going to begin?”

“Oh! immediate, immediate; and you’ll not moind moi joke?”

“Joke! oh no, it was—capital!” replied Poulton, laughing at the worthy Bodgett instead of at what the lout called his joke. Bodgett then, without further delay, marched his burly carcass off to the ground that had been marked off for the competitions, followed by

the Kings Beeches lads, as well as by the village clowns who were either to take part in them or to stand by and applaud the successes of their chums. Altogether, there was a very considerable crowd; so great, indeed, that the Beeches had the greatest difficulty in keeping close together as they had been most positively ordered to do by their leaders, who seemed to fear a surprise. At first the country chaps were rough and noisy—egged on by the juvenile Pitchcotians—in their jests and horse-play at the students; but as the programme proceeded, and it was found that the latter won nearly every event for which they entered a champion, the tables were turned and the village lads became the objects of the ridicule of half the countryside. Races, steeplechases over hurdles, running in sacks, three-legged races, matches with buckets of water in their hands; jumping of all sorts; single-stick bouts—all these minor affairs they carried off almost without serious effort. In the wrestling contests, however, they were decidedly beaten, owing to the greater weight of the country lads; but in the boxing for light-weights some of the Uppers gained well-deserved laurels—Eustace Poulton and Ned Turville especially proving themselves equal to any with the gloves. In fact, they won so many of the prizes that murmurs began to rise among their opponents.

“You have been training, and it ain’t fair,” growled out one hulking fellow, as Bodgett began, at the close of the programme, to deliver the prizes. “What d’ye

say, lads? Why should we give 'em the prizes at all?" A murmur of assent ran round the throng, and the time-serving Bodgett at once suspended his occupation.

"Ay, why? don't you give no more, Muster Bodgett!" "They 'aint won fair!" "Let 'em go home as they came—empty!" These and other shouts warned Poulton that there was likely to be an immediate row, and he passed the word for the Beeches to close up tightly together.

"Tackle that ugly-mugged chap, Ned!" he whispered to Turville, "and I'll soon shut up yon lanky beggar in the yellow waistcoat!"

Without the slightest difficulty the two Beeches managed to rouse the ire of the louts in question, who struck at them in their clumsy rage.

"Coats off and make a ring!" shouted Bodgett. A ring, a quarter of which was formed by Beeches boys, was at once formed.

"I'll not take off my coat for such an ourang-outang as that fellow!" said Poulton scornfully, buttoning his jacket, as did also Ned Turville. The "ourang-outang" and his mate advanced in a blue rage, and the two fights went on simultaneously. But the louts were no match for such well-practised warriors as were Poulton and Turville, and after a few minutes of wild fighting, in which their clumsy strength was never once able to assert itself, the two villagers were "licked into fits," and lay on the green pummelled to an extent they had never before experienced.

"Will you give us our prizes now?" asked Poulton, cool and without a scratch, as he walked with Turville (who was in the same unharmed state) to where Bodgett was standing.

"No! no! don't ye give 'em, Muster Bodgett!" rose from the Pitchcotians.

"No, I sha'n't!" said the secretary, who always held with the strongest party.

"You wou't?"

"I won't!"

"Well, you shall all suffer for it—we'll warm your jackets for you, you cheating scoundrels! Mind, I warn you!" said Eustace Poulton.

"Get along with ye for a pack of young boasters,—there's nowt in ye, ye idle windbags!" answered Bodgett with a sneer. And Poulton, seeing the crisis was come, that they were quite outnumbered and over-matched, gave the word, and the Beeches made a rapid retreat from the green, saluted with volleys of abuse, ridicule, and a few stones, none of which would Poulton allow them to return until they had gained some rising ground, when they discharged such a storm of stones right down into the fair as drove the occupants of the shows and booths flying out for their lives, as the missiles rattled and crashed on the wooden and canvas roofs with which the place was crowded. Then they took to their heels, and were safe in the grounds of the College before the folk at the fair had got over their fright.

CHAPTER III.

A "BAPTISM OF FIRE."

THERE was considerable discontent and querulous growling as the party got under the shelter of the old walls; but most of the Uppers only laughed at the warlike remonstrances of the senior Lowers, seeming to think the whole of what had happened as an excellent joke, quite undeserving of serious attention. Ned Turville, however, was in a rabid state; the sight of his opponent's blood had only roused him to the delights of battle, just as it rouses a bull-dog; he was for an instant resumption of the contest—but then, remembering himself, he lapsed into a patient, longing silence that no one could tempt him to break. Eustace Poulton was quite calm and collected; spending the time before tea, or supper rather, in confabulations with various leaders amongst Uppers, as well as with young Watty Royle, who was a safe leader of Lowers. Supper over and twilight well set in, the whole school (except the very smallest fellows) assembled in the Beech Walk, where they were divided into three strong bodies—an equal proportion of Uppers being with each. The firework boxes—in far greater numbers than had ever before been known—were then brought out and opened, when, to the great astonish-

ment of all the Lowers, they were found to contain nothing but rockets of considerable weight, with a few Bengal lights, and a small number of Roman candles. They were divided evenly amongst the three divisions, while a certain proportion of the blue lights and candles were handed to some eight or ten Uppers, who, with Watty Royle, were placed apart as Eustace Poulton's staff-officers. Then the latter made a brief speech, in which he informed the divisions that they were about to attack Pitchcot in force; that the extra rockets had all been purchased out of "The Pitchcot Attack Secret Service Fund;" that all were implicitly to obey their leaders, whose names he now called over; and that nothing whatever was to be done without positive orders. The whole body were then marched up to a place under the garden wall, where were piled great heaps of stones for mending the farm roads, and each boy filled all his pockets and every available portion of his dress with the missiles. The three divisions were again separated, and when it was quite dark were marched in dead silence, and almost without a sound of any sort, into their several positions under the personal directions of "General" Poulton. The first, or Ned Turville's, occupied the post of greatest danger and honour—a rising ground on the right of and at the very back of the village-green, which thus lay between them and the College, where they were to remain concealed until a given signal should be seen. The second division, under an Upper, named Hill, took up its position on

the left of the village itself, also, on rising ground, and it also was to await orders before acting. The third division was under the command of Watty Royle (this was done to induce the Lowers to enter heart and soul into the affair), and lay on the high ground dividing Kings Beeches from Pitchcot. When Poulton had satisfied himself that all his men were in proper position, and quite understood the signals he was going to give, he retired with his staff to a spot close by the third division, and listened for some moments with a grim smile to the clangour and row the bands, fiddles, drums, and trumpets were making on the Green, now crowded to excess with dancers and merry-makers, while he whispered to his aides-de-camp—

“The cheats! they are now, I think, in the very height of their revelry.”

“Yes, now’s the time; the tents and booths are filled to excess. Shall I strike the light?”

“Do!”

A match was struck and handed to Poulton, who lit the fuse of a Roman candle, which he held aloft as it began to sputter forth its balls of fire. As soon as three of these candles had ceased burning, a rocket from the extreme right of Watty Royle’s division, which was extended in line at long intervals, whirled in the direction of the Green, but fell short. The next was better, but still short. “Cease firing!” was passed along the line; then “Advance!” and they crept up slowly towards the Green. Again fire

was opened, and this time with effect. The rockets began to fall thick amongst the tents, the dancers, the music, and the booths, causing at first considerable fun. That feeling, however, soon changed to anxiety, as the fiery rods came thicker and thicker and better aimed; which in its turn became absolute fright as the mob began to close in on the erections for shelter, crowding them to suffocation, and endangering their very existence from the pressure. The villagers were evidently in a panic, as rocket after rocket shot right into their midst; but after a little while seemed to make up their minds to charge the boys (of course they knew the attack could come from nowhere else but Kings Beeches), and were just on the point of doing so, when Poulton fired a single Roman candle, and Ned Turville's division, in a second, sent a perfect hurricane of rockets right into the enemy's rear. Bewildered, seriously frightened, and fancying all sorts of horrors, most of the Pitchcot guests made off home along the road that lay between the first and third divisions as fast as they could; while the bewildered Pitchcotians, irritated to frenzy by pain, fear that their village would be burned down, and the taunts and invectives of the tent and booth keepers, whose property was suffering, while all chance of further profit that night was gone, determined to charge Turville's party, whose fire was most galling. But going up the hill in the face of such a fire was no joke, and the louts were hardly a third of the way when two Roman candles were sent

up by Poulton, and the second division commenced pouring its fire right over the village and on to the Green, and in the rear of the fellows who were trying to attack Turville. This fire far exceeded in rapidity and intensity that of the other two divisions, which was now failing a little. It succeeded in instilling the spirit of terror completely into the hearts of the Pitchcotians, who felt that they were quite surrounded and hemmed in on all sides ; they wavered in their advance, they paused, one or two ran back, the whole body then broke into confusion and dismay and tore away to their houses in the village in the most absolute and complete state of terror. The tent and booth people being thus left to sustain the brunt of attack from all three divisions, followed the cowardly example of the louts, and made for the houses for shelter, leaving more than one of the tents in flames. Poulton lit three Bengal lights at once ; half of each division then covered their faces with either pulled-down caps or pocket-handkerchiefs and advanced on the Green at a quick run, their comrades remaining, supplied with lighted matches so as to be ready to resume fire should the attack be defeated. With a wild cheer the three parties dashed on to the Green, tore down the blazing tents first, and stamped out the flames, then they cut the ropes and tumbled down the sound ones and the wooden booths, as far as they were able ; pulled the shows pretty well to pieces, turned on all the taps of the beer-casks, emptied the spirit-jars and bottles—in

fact, made a complete and hopeless wreck of what, only an hour or two before, had been a gay scene of amusement and festivity. Then Poulton and Turville and Rolfe called off their men—for it was to be feared that the showmen would make an attack, even if the villagers could not muster up courage enough—and with a fine shower of rockets, in the air this time, the whole school gave three cheers of victory and retired home.

There was, of course, a desperate commotion made over this affair, as some tolerably serious injuries had been sustained, and no little damage done to property; but what could be done? The boys were firm as adamant, and no hint whatever could be extracted from them as regarded their ringleaders. The villagers could not identify a single one of them with certainty; the showmen were quite satisfied with a sum “in compensation” that was secretly sent for distribution among them; and no one pitied the publicans, whose beer and spirits had been poured out freer than water on the Green. So as no one was found out, no one could be punished, and no one ever regretted the “tug of war” with the Pitchcotians. The next year the Kings Beeches nesting-grounds were unmolested; the blackberries and nuts remained ungathered by the louts, and peace between the rival powers once more seemed permanent, and has—with, of course, a few brief skirmishes of no import—remained so to the present day. Indeed, ever after the

memorable siege of the village, the mere mention of "rockets" was sufficient to bring any offender to his knees; and the rising generation of boys in Pitchcot hear wondrous tales from their elders of the storming they underwent (of course with great courage) on that memorable occasion.

Ned Turville and Eustace Poulton both entered the army after leaving college—the former in the cavalry, the latter in a line regiment. Ned Turville has distinguished himself in India as a most dashing officer under fire, and wears on his breast more than one reward for daring bravery. Eustace Poulton has also seen a great deal of service, but always on the staff, where his military talents entitled him to be placed. At the last autumn manœuvres his services were of a most valuable nature; so much so that he is regarded by some of the best military critics as "the coming man" of the British army.





Story the Third.

A HAPPY FAMILY.

HARRY PANDON was lying in ambush on the rising ground dividing Pitchcot from Kings Beeches, peering eagerly into the former village. Every now and then he took up a small but very powerful deer-stalker's telescope, turning it on certain of the cottages lying more remote from him, and scanning the outhouses, gardens, and party-walls as he eagerly looked for something apparently not forthcoming. His whole soul was evidently in his occupation. He sighed once or twice heavily as he glanced at his watch and noted how rapidly the minute-hand was advancing towards the next study time. He shifted uneasily every now and then, crawling on all-fours—for his nature was naturally a secret one, preferring dark and tortuous courses when open and plain ones would have answered his purpose equally well—

nearer and yet nearer the village, but always keeping the major portion of his body well under cover. But what he sought was apparently not to be seen, look as he might; and he was beginning to shut up his glass in despair, when he noticed coming along the back of the ridge one of the small boys of the school, who was plainly endeavouring, as was Harry himself, to keep out of sight both of the village and of Kings Beeches.

"Hillo, you young imp! where are you sneaking to?" he called out, when young Wheeler was almost up to him. The little fellow started in dismay; he had not noticed the other lying in the long grass, and stood for a second trembling and undecided whether to advance or turn tail and cut for it.

"Come here, or I'll make it hot for you!"

Wheeler made no more ado—for Pandon was one of the swiftest runners in the College—but came straight on.

"Look here; I want you to go down towards the village, right past Widow Tappin's house, and try if you can see where her black Tom-cat is hiding."

"Oh, I can't, Pandon; it's just study time; besides, I should be caught," was the little fellow's answer.

"Can't? I say you must; if you don't I'll thrash you; besides, you're out of bounds, and I can split on you!" By way of a foretaste of the licking, Pandon sprang forward and caught the boy by the ear, which he wrenched violently. Wheeler yelled out with the pain.

"Oh, don't, Pandon ! I'd go, only there's no time," whimpered out the victim ; "besides, you're out of bounds yourself."

"What do you mean by comparing yourself to me ?" and Pandon gave two or three more sharp pulls at the ear he still grasped. "I've leave to be out to look after my pets, haven't I ?"

"Yes, but your pets ain't here," was the whining reply. "You only have leave for the farmyard."

"That's nothing to you ; I have leave, and my pets may be anywhere. Will you go ?" Another wrench accompanied the question by way of a reminder, and under its influence the youngster gave a most unwilling consent. With strict injunctions to spy about for the cat, without attracting attention, and then to come back with a correct report of where the animal was basking, Wheeler started on his undesired journey with a promise (which he knew full well would be strictly carried out) that if he did not succeed he would be accommodated with a thrashing such as he had never before received. Fortunately for the little fellow, he speedily came across the object of his search, and was able on his return to report to Pandon that the animal in question was lying in the sun under the thick hedge of the widow's back garden, to all appearance fast asleep.

"Are there any runs—holes—in the hedge ?"

"I didn't see any, Pandon," the boy answered, as he fidgeted to be off home.

“ Well, you must come up here to-morrow, at this time—or say half-an-hour earlier—and then I’ll send you down again to look closer. Now be off, and mind, if you blab of me to any one, I’ll thrash the life out of you !”

Wheeler, quite taking to heart the threat, which previous experience taught him would be carried out in its integrity, gladly ran away down to the school, Harry Pandon following more leisurely, but yet in time not to be locked out from studies—a fate that would have involved a pretty stiff imposition on a Lower, as our cat fancier was. Not that his taste—we cannot call it love—for animals was confined to cats ; in fact, it was only of late that his fancy lay in that direction ; but he was generally supposed by masters and boys to have a decided partiality for live animals of all sorts, and that partiality was rather fostered than otherwise by the former. Harry Pandon had come to the Beeches some three or four years before the opening of this narrative, from his home in Wales, with the character of being a devoted follower of practical natural history, so far as his years would allow, and with a request from his parents that the tendency might not be discouraged, as his father, an eminent local physician, meant him for his own profession, and considered that the taste he displayed would be rather an advantage than otherwise. Our hero was now pretty well advanced in Lowers ; his peculiar talent had been encouraged as far as practicable ; his talents (and they were rather above than

below the average) had been as carefully nurtured as was usual at Kings Beeches, while his private character had been, as was but too often the case, more or less overlooked, because its chief points were by no means prominent amongst a large and mixed crowd of boys. His public appearances before the masters were not more frequent than those of his comrades; he seldom or never got into any scrapes beyond the ordinary ones incident to boyhood; he paid very fair attention to his studies and to the rules of the school; and his career was altogether just of that negative kind that attracts attention least of all, and may be good, bad, or simply indifferent without any one taking much notice. Amongst his companions he was tolerably well liked, being obliging enough in most things, while his skill as a handicraftsman was eagerly sought for when anything had to be manufactured, and his authority on all questions relating to the capture, rearing, and training of birds, beasts, and reptiles was undoubted, and of the greatest possible use to fanciers. To the very small boys he was, however, decidedly obnoxious; for there was no little of the bully in his composition, and he went out of his way to tease and annoy little fellows on every possible occasion, while he never scrupled to force them into his service for dirty and dangerous work, even when he knew that by so doing he was exposing them to serious risks of severe punishment. For the rest, he was free-handed enough with his money, his good things, and his advice and personal

service in his own line ; so that, on the whole, if the school was polled it would have probably appeared that the majority regarded him in the light of "a good fellow" than otherwise. One point he was very firm upon—he would never allow the slightest interference with his pets, nor would he permit of any advice or counsel whatever regarding his peculiar methods of training or educating them.

But "what did Harry Pandon want to know all about the Widow Tappin's black Tom-cat for?" was a question that little Wheeler asked himself, without being at all able to arrive at a solution ; nor was the riddle easily to be read unless one knew what Pandon had been about for some time past. Tired of having stray birds, mice, hedgehogs, lizards, &c., &c., hanging about in different places where they were always in danger of being injured, killed, or stolen by enemies both human and inhuman, Pandon was struck one day with a brilliant idea of amalgamating his collection in one huge cage—in fact, of resolving the many antagonistic animals he possessed into "A Happy Family," all dwelling in peace and amity under one roof.

"That's all jolly fine, Harry," remarked Barney Simcox, himself a noted naturalist, and consequently a keen rival of Pandon's ; "it's all very fine ; but how can you train full-grown beings to keep the peace towards one another ?"

The announcement had been made at a sort of "scratch" meeting of *savans*, held in a disused wash-

house off one of the play-rooms that was specially devoted to the entertainment of members of the animal kingdom, and it had been received with considerable doubt, but no ridicule—for Pandon was undoubtedly at the head of the scientific tree.

“You just go and teach your grandmother to suck eggs, Barney,” was the contemptuous reply. “If I say a thing, I mean to do it; and I think you fellows,” appealing to the assembly, “will give me credit for knowing what I am about.”

This last could not be disputed, as was plainly evidenced by the chorus of approbation Pandon’s appeal had drawn forth. So Barney Simcox retired into his boots as he muttered his disbelief in the process about to be undertaken, and his distinct opinion that “it was all bosh!”

“Bosh, or no bosh, I’ll do it—you just see if I don’t! Come to me at the end of three months or so, and then I’ll talk to you, Barney; but until then I think you may as well hold that silly tongue of yours.”

“Silly tongue, yourself!” retorted the other, firing up.

“Yes, silly tongue! Why, you’re just like my old magpie—can do nothing but chatter out what it has just heard!”

Barney Simcox was evidently thinking of active hostilities after this taunt; but remembering that his opponent was no mean boxer, nor altogether devoid of courage, more especially when he thought he had an

called his "pets") he scientifically killed, preserving their skins, feathers, or skeletons, according to the best known methods, for future operations in the arts of stuffing, &c. The other birds, beasts, and reptiles were huddled into the dark holes allotted to them, in an almost starving state, or one of outrageous repletion, according to their several natures; while the bolder were cowed into submission by treatment that was nearly, if not absolutely, cruel. But in spite of these precautionary measures some members of the "Family" could not be prevented from turning on the others, and more than one corpse was extracted from the cupboards in the early morning before any one else could be witness of what had happened. Whatever Pandon could do secretly, that he was sure to do without the public being aware of it, and this matter of the conduct of his "Family" he kept so strictly to himself, that no one really knew whether they were alive or dead. Those that fell victims to their voracious or cruel neighbours, he replaced with young ones in the dead of the night, while he killed off some more possessed of untameable natures. Dead or alive, however, the collection began to become most offensive to the nostrils of the passers-by; complaints were made both long and loud; one or two of the masters were appealed to; and finally Pandon was ordered to break up his "Family," or at least remove its members from their present habitation. Pandon appealed to the Principal, but in vain; and after a long discussion he was obliged to agree to a com-

promise, whereby he was to take his "Family" off to a shed in the farm-yard that was given up to his sole control, subject to the occasional supervision of old Purrett, the head yardman. The change was a positive gain to Harry Pandon. He could visit his pets quite unmolested; he could change them from old ones to young ones without remark; and he was quite unobserved whenever he should see fit to make away with unsuitable subjects, or replace them with others more fit for his requirements. For all these purposes he had full leave and licence from the Principal, so that as long as he could keep old Purrett on his side he was safe for more liberty, more independence of action, and more freedom from masters' supervision than had ever been enjoyed by any boy before at Kings Beeches.

He had got his menagerie into something like tolerable order by the time mentioned above, when he met young Wheeler. His owl would not eat his mice; his hawk never tried to kill his starlings and other young birds; his squirrel was left unmolested by the wretched cur (picked up out of the lanes) that did duty for a dog; his rabbit fed at liberty wherever it could find out anything to its taste; and his young fox was most abstemious as regarded the birds and beasts to which it had access. All these results had been attained by means of starvation, seclusion, and no end of thrashings; but however come by, they were heartily welcome to Harry Pandon, who prided himself no little on the success he had already attained. Many other brutes—we cannot

find a better or more general scientific term—in addition to those we have alluded to, had Harry Pandon in his collection in the farm-yard, but we have neither time nor space to detail them, and must therefore pass on to other matters. Now, there was one animal that Pandon desired to crown his collection, but that he seemed never to be able to get. The object of his ambition was a cat. He had tried after several, but he was quite unable to get hold of them. He might have had a kitten over and over again—though even that was not so easy of attainment by any other fellow than Pandon—but he had been chaffed about kittens by Barney Simcox, and was fully determined that he would master a full-grown cat, and make him live in peace and amity with the remainder of the collection, or suffer any amount of chaff as a punishment for failure. He had, therefore, carefully looked all round for an animal suitable to his purposes, and had at last pitched upon the splendid black Tom of Widow Tapping as the one in a thousand that would be a credit both to the “Happy Family” and to his own talents as a trainer, or breaker-in rather, of animals. He hungered and thirsted, so to speak, after that black Tom, but still he seemed no nearer the possession of him than he was the very first day his eyes lighted on him. This Tom was beyond doubt a pampered favourite; of his sleek appearance there could be no question, and therefore he must be well fed; cat’s-meat-men were quite unknown in the village—*ergo*, the Tom must be fed on butchers’

meat—*ergo*, he must be sleepy—*ergo*, he was easily to be captured—*ergo*, Harry Pandon would have him for his collection at any price.

Harry Pandon was learned in all tricks for deluding most animals; but where his knowledge failed, he made no hesitation about applying for information in the best quarters, generally putting the teachings he received to a pretty severe test before he tried them in his own interests, and thus securing a success that other lads could not hope for. But catching a fine black Tom-cat fairly beat him. There were no authorities whatever on the subject; books gave directions for snaring almost every other known animal on the face of the earth, but cats were unaccountably left out of the list, and Harry Pandon was in a fix. He was in the habit, however, of arguing from analogy, and therefore, if cats were not actually mentioned, he must look to animals of similar *physique* for the solution of the problem. Hares—they were, Pandon resolved after immense research, much the same as cats—offered the best chance; so the young animal-tamer studied with scrupulous care all the arts and “dodges” whereby the “puss” of the fields and downs was to be compassed. Now, hares, as everybody knows, are very apt to run through fixed “runs” or gaps in hedges when they frequent certain fields for any length of time; and, arguing from this fact, Pandon considered that cats were probably much the same in their habits; and for that reason it was that he had sent young Wheeler,

on the day when our record opens, to examine and report upon the *locus in quo* of the Widow Tappin's Tom, and the "runs" in the hedge under which the "noble animal" was basking.

[Be it here noted, that at the time of the conversation with Wheeler, mentioned in the beginning of this paper, the Happy Family had been established for some two months in the farm-yard den allotted to Pandon for the special purpose.]

Having, therefore, ascertained its whereabouts exactly, as also its habits "of an afternoon," Pandon pondered the matter over well; took counsel with those he could implicitly trust as being similar to himself in disposition and nature; and finally determined on a plan of operations at once new and judicious.

He contrived, with the compelled assistance of the unfortunate Wheeler, to ascertain pretty exactly the animal's hours, habits, and general customs. These he marked and noted in his book for many a long day, until he was able to strike a fair average; and when once that had been hit upon, he proceeded to turn his speculations into severe earnest. Wheeler had noticed that the Tom was superlatively fond of basking near the back hedge of the widow's garden; that he *could not* resist temptation in the way of a perfume of salt fish; and that there were two runs in the hedge, and only two, one of which Master Tom *must* take, provided he was sufficiently tempted. The question, after that, was, "Could Harry Pandon tempt him through the

hedge, or could he not?" It took a long time—a very long time; in fact whole holidays were spent, as well as dozens of herrings, over the job—before the black Tom took the slightest notice of the trap that was being laid for him. At last he began to think the smell of the fish rather strange—pleasant, if strange—and to lift up his head with a questioning sort of sniff when the soft south wind brought the fragrance down on his nostrils. Then, one day Master Thomas was induced to lay his coal-black nose right against the lower part of the hedge, close by a "run," and to sniff and sniff in the most ominous fashion. Presently he began to think the odour was rather nice than otherwise; he wondered where it could come from; he began to question if it was not meant for him; he supposed it would be no great harm to make a closer investigation; and in a moment of weakness Tom made for the well-accustomed hole in the Widow Tappin's hedge, and—neck or nothing—made a dash to get out into the dry ditch beyond, where lay the deluding herring. A sharp pull up; a click; a light as if all the stars of heaven were jumbling together, and poor Tommy found himself fast gripped by the neck and struggling for very, very breath in a copper-wire noose!

"Now then, Wheeler; look sharp, or the beggar will kick himself to death," said Harry Pandon in a loud whisper to his unwilling accomplice, who stood at some distance off. They both ran forward hastily, Wheeler carrying a large canvas bag, and before the

examining stock, marking out what pigs were next to be killed, picking out holes and defects in the labourers' work, and otherwise making themselves (as the afore-said labourers considered) disagreeable, when a most unearthly noise struck upon their ears, and they were forced to pause, in utter amazement, before they could make anything of it. When they recovered their senses, they simultaneously ran in the direction of the sound, which seemed to come from one of the sheds in the corner of the yard.

"It's Muster Pandon's animals—or wild beasteses I call 'em—it is from his shed anyways!" said old Purrett.

"What on earth is the boy after, then?" asked Red Weskit, who knew little of Pandon and liked him less.

"Dunno, I'm seartain—let's iv a look in and see!"

They did look in, but they found that the window was barred up.

"It's the birds, as can't bear the light!" said old Purrett.

"Birds don't make that awful screeching, Purrett," gravely remonstrated Peter Westcott; "I'm just for knocking the door in!"

Suiting the action to the word, Red Weskit placed his powerful shoulder to the door, gave a great grunt as he swallowed down his strength; the door flew open, and he and Purrett flew in, to witness one of the most revolting acts of cruelty that human being can be guilty of.

What it was is too disgusting to be described in detail—even, indeed, if we had stomach for it, which we confess we have not. Suffice it to say that the brutal Pandon was discovered skinning the Tom-cat (to preserve its gloss, the wretch afterwards explained) alive! and was actually in the midst of his fearfully diabolical work when he was interrupted as described.

Peter Westcott at once took him by the neck.

“You fearful young scoundrel,” he cried, “no punishment could possibly be too great for you! Come along to the Principal!” and he dragged him out of the place, while old Purrett with one well-directed blow put the remains of Widow Tappin’s black Tom out of its misery.

The Principal absolutely refused to have anything whatever to say to this brutal deed of Pandon’s. He wrote for the father to come down, and on his arrival handed over his son to him with these words:—

“Take him, sir; we could not so far disgrace the College as to have even an investigation into this affair.”

So Harry Pandon was walked off in the dead of the night; his animals were, such as would go, turned free; and his name was erased from the Kings Beeches register, lest the fair fame of the other scholars should be tainted by its presence.

Mr. Pandon could do nothing at home with his cruel son, so he sent him to sea as a midshipman on a

merchant-vessel. For many years after his first voyage he was not heard of by his father (thus treating with cruelty even his own family), and the first and last news they obtained of an authentic nature was last autumn, when Harry Pandon, the mate of the American ship *Towering Stars*, was sentenced at Liverpool to ten years' penal servitude for brutal cruelty to a seaman.





Story the Fourth.

TEMPTATION—WILL HE FALL, OR CONQUER?

CHAPTER I.

A QUONDAM PARLOUR BOARDER.

A GLORIOUS summer day. A brilliant sun ; great piles of white fleecy clouds scarce moving in the intense blue of the clear sky ; occasionally a balmy, murmuring breeze, whispering through the branches of pleasant coolness in the shade ; birds too lazy to even twitter, hopping now and again, as their gambols led them, about the gnarled branches of the old beech-trees ; two lads seated in one of the rustic summer-houses belonging to the Beeches Farm, engaged in deep and earnest conversation. Away on the cricket-ground a game was

going on, but it was almost too hot for even that pastime, and the players exhibited but little of their usual sprightliness.

“And you are really getting to like it?”

It was Albert Twysdale who asked the question of his class-fellow, Robert Hinton. The manner of the latter, or perhaps the fact of his having joined the school a good deal older than was usual, had always prevented his Christian name from degenerating into Bob, while no fellow in his senses would have ever dreamed of giving him a nickname.

“Yes ; much more used to it than I was a year ago ; still I find the restraint a great nuisance ; it’s a bore to be tied by the leg, and I often wish that I had stuck to the Richmond crib.”

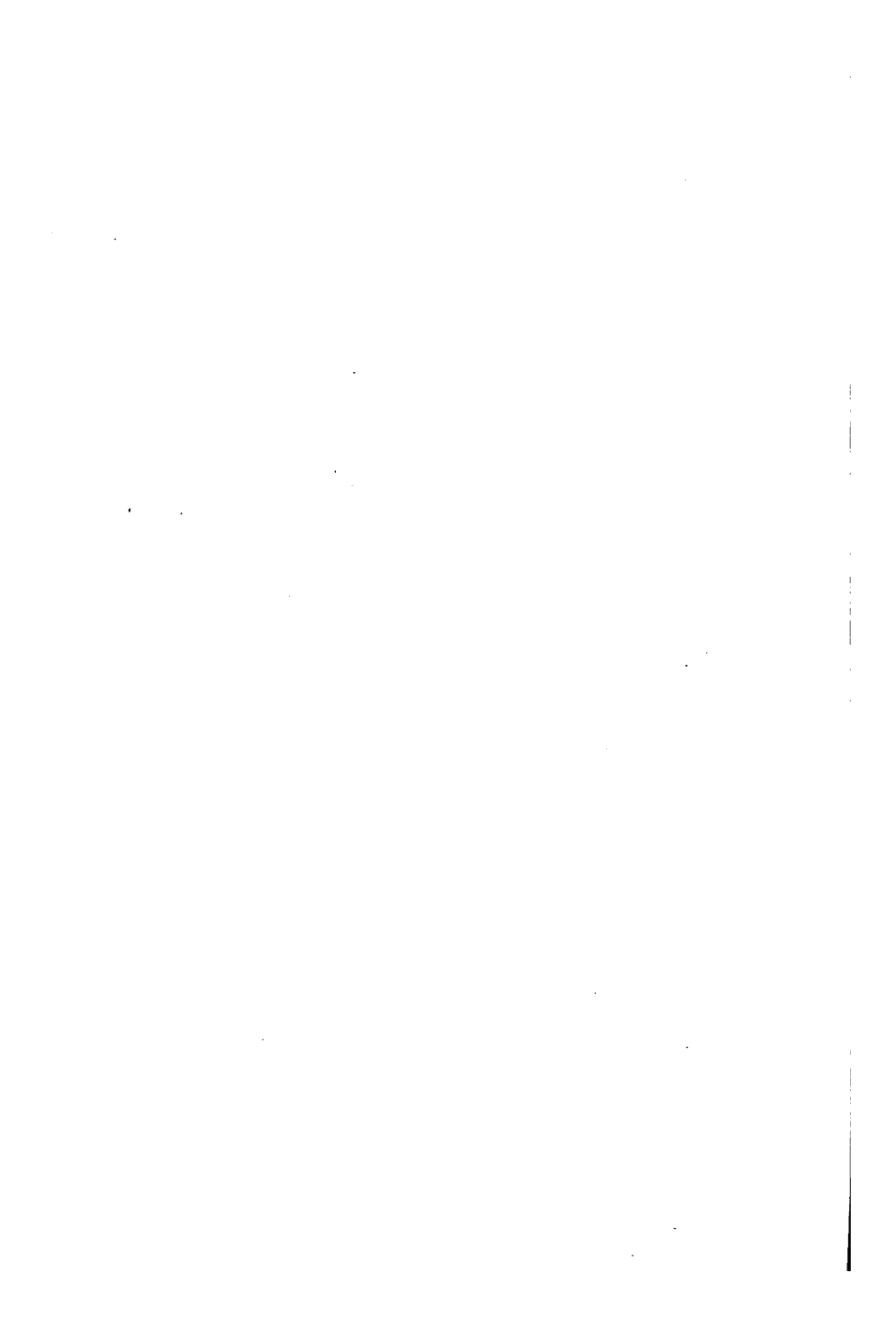
“Depend upon it, Hinton, if you had remained as a parlour-boarder in that place you never would have done any good ;” and Twysdale rolled over to look his friend more keenly in the face. Hinton gave vent to a sort of dry cynical laugh that was unpleasant because it was evidently not natural.

“What ! at the preaching again, old Twy ? I thought you promised me not to get ‘on the stump’ again for a week.”

The other laughed out heartily : “I’m sure if that is being ‘on the stump’ you’ll never get out of the way of itinerant preachers. No ; I only said what was quite true—you would *not* have done any good in that idle, good-for-nothing, dissipated place.”



KING'S BEECHES FARM.



"I don't know that—I picked up a very fair idea of billiards there."

Hinton was naturally, in spite of his great and versatile talents, careless, wild, mischief-loving, and reckless. He was idle, too, until his ambition became excited, when no work was too hard and no hours too long for him.

"Billiards!" echoed the other with strong disdain, "fancy any one with a brain and a mind boasting of his skill in knocking one lump of ivory against two others!"

"Balls, not lumps, Twy," quietly put in Hinton. He delighted in seeing his comrade—who was very clever, very steady, very self-controlled, and in every way a most superior character—in a state of indignant virtue, and he knew well how to induce it.

"Lumps or balls—call them what you will—it is senseless work for talent. Spend ten years of your life at it, and even then any marker will beat you into fits."

"Well, but to go back to where we started. I liked Richmond for more reasons than billiards. I'm fond of society, fond of more out-door and more manly sports than I can get here. I like life—theatres, concerts, dances, &c. In fact, I'm in the unpleasant position of having been treated almost as a grown man, and now I am back again, back with boys——"

"Like me?"

"No, *not* like you, Twy; you are far more of a real

man than I am"—Hinton actually sighed over the truth of his own words; "but confess, it is hard for me with my knowledge of the world to be turned into a school-boy again!"

"Not if it is for your ultimate good. You have strong tendencies to evil, so have I, so have all—well, the quiet and regularity of old Kings Beeches will cure all that. You are—excuse 'the stump' just this once—as proud as proud can be, the 'roughing' at this place will take a great deal of it out of you. You have too much money—you will have no chance of spending it here, and will thus avoid becoming a spendthrift. No, Hinton, depend upon it whoever placed you here did a wise act, and proved himself a wise man."

Again the dry, hard laugh from Hinton as he asked—

"Was he, indeed? You are sure he was wise?"

"Certain."

"Thanks for the compliment, Twy; I placed myself here."

"Your father, you mean," said Twysdale. He had never known Robert Hinton to prevaricate, and rarely even to exaggerate.

"My father, poor man, has worn himself out, I believe, with too much 'life,' and is a hopeless invalid, who cares very little indeed what becomes of me. No, Twy, I *felt* all you have just told me when at Richmond, and I determined to give myself a chance. I wrote to my people for their consent, and it followed me here."

“Well, you *are* a strange fellow, Hinton; and now you are tiring of this?”

A weary look passed over the young fellow's face as he answered—

“I believe I tire of everything, Twy; I began too young, I think. I've never had a home fixed in any one place. None of my people seem to care a straw where I am or what I do. I am, and have been since a mere child, my own master; and had it not been for you, dear old fellow, I don't know what on earth would have become of me.” Hinton was very warm-hearted, and his last words were full of affection as he stretched out his hand for Twysdale's, and grasped it cordially. All he had said of himself was quite true, and as they rose to go in—the bell was just beginning to ring—Twysdale rejoiced that his friend's really fine qualities had enabled their owner to see the right course and adopt it. Not that Hinton had by any means attained that self-control that would ensure his going safely through the pilgrimage of life—there was too great a leaven of wildness in him for that happy consummation as yet; nor had he utterly subdued the pride and *hauteur* that formed part of his nature—but he had, beyond all doubt, made strong efforts in the right direction, and so far all was good.

* * * * *

“Just fancy!” “Awfully sudden, wasn't it?” “Poor fellow, I'm sorry for him!” and dozens of similar exclamations were to be heard a morning or

two subsequent to the conversation above narrated, shortly after the distribution of letters.

"What is it all about?" asked Twysdale, coming out of Upper boys' library.

"Why, Hinton's father's dead!" blurted out two or three voices.

"Dead!" Twysdale was as unprepared for the news as had been Hinton himself, and hurried off to say and do what he could for one he so much liked and admired.

He found him, with dry eyes, but a very pale face, hastily packing a portmanteau.

"Hinton, old fellow, I'm very sorry to hear——"

"Oh, yes, yes," the other broke in nervously, "an awful shock for my poor mother—for me—for all, I suppose; but, Twy, I'm off to catch the coach at Buncombe. I'm to join her at Paris, where—where—" he hesitated, but immediately added, "you'll write, Twy, won't you?"

"Of course I will, old fellow; but where to?"

"There's the address. Now help me—I have not a moment to spare."

In half an hour he had left Kings Beeches, and something seemed to whisper to Twysdale, who stood out in the road watching the steward's gig rapidly disappearing, "He will never come back to the old school."

When Robert Hinton arrived at the Hôtel Meurice, where his father had died, he found things in a state that

rather grated on his sensitive mental constitution. His mother's brother, Colonel Mervin—whom Robert had known of old as a very "loose fish," if report could be believed—had joined his sister as soon as the news reached him of what had taken place, and was now self-installed as a sort of director-general of all the family arrangements. He took upon himself the ordering of everything with an amount of bluster, swagger, and noisy affectation of silence and sorrow that was eminently disagreeable. He gave the necessary instructions for a most ostentatious funeral; he had the apartments full nearly all day with undertakers, tradesmen, drapers, attendants from a *maison de deuil*, and all the cloud of human vultures that gathers when Death has claimed another victim; and he encouraged Mrs. Hinton in an outward display of severe sentimental grief, that loves the *entourage* of handsome mourning and the sympathy it excites. For Robert's mother was unfortunately a vain silly woman of the world, with no depth of affection for any one save herself, and no thoughts in her head save those of dress, display, and amusement. She had loved her deceased husband as well as she could love anything, but her grief for his death was far more apparent than sincere. Her mind was in a confused and rather hysterical state between semi-sorrow, anxiety for the future, agitation at the shock she had received by the sudden death, fussiness over the proper make and fashion of her widow's weeds, and a little excitement over the meeting with her son.

"Well, Robert, my lad," said Colonel Mervin one day, shortly after the funeral, "what do you think it will be best to do to-night? I must not allow you to mope and fret here day after day; it only teases your poor mother, who has plenty of trouble on her hands without that."

It was after dinner, and they were sitting over their dessert, Mrs. Hinton having retired to her private sitting-room.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Robert dreamily. He was in low spirits, had been so for some days, and seemed to long for something, he knew not what, to stir him up to active life again. His uncle was rather of the boisterous type so common amongst feather-bed soldiers, and could not bear dulness of any kind.

"You'll have to cheer up, Robert; there's a lot to do and think about. You see, you are the heir to the property now, and you will have to help your mother in proving the will, and all that kind of thing. You *must* rouse yourself. What do you say to our dropping in at one of the theatres for an hour or so? we can go where we shan't be noticed."

"Oh, I'll go if you like, uncle; anything for a change from this gloomy old room."

"Don't call me 'uncle,'" said the Colonel, who hated to be thought other than a gay young fellow of five-and-twenty or so—in reality he was the shady side of forty.

"What am I to call you, then? Ned?" asked

Robert, laughing in his sleeve at the vanity of the other.

"Well, no; Adah might not like that exactly; but you can call me simple Mervin."

"All right, 'Simple Mervin'——"

"Oh, there you are yourself again; at your jokes as usual. You'll soon be all right now."

The Colonel rose from the table with his jolly laugh, and the two went off to see a brilliant little piece at the Variétés. Supper in the Palais Royal followed; a few intimates of the Colonel joined their table; wine, cigars, and sparkling conversation kept them occupied for a couple of hours or so, and when Robert retired to bed at an early hour *in the morning*, he began to think that "life," after all, was better than the dull utility-course of existence at Kings Beeches, to which he had previously quite made up his mind to return. The next day the Colonel, who was a great man for what the French very aptly call "distraction," made up a party for Versailles. The weather was splendid; the guests were all men of means, of fashion, and of pleasure; the scene was a fascinating one for a boy whose tastes all lay in the direction of pleasure and gaiety. Robert enjoyed the whole affair thoroughly, and a long evening at the Opera Bouffe, with subsequent amusements, similar to those of the previous evening, sent him to his rest flushed, excited, and with a mind whose balance was growing very unsteady. Having once fairly broken the ice of seclusion, the Colonel went

ahead with great gusto; his nephew, who as heir to a fine property when he should come of age was well supplied, was eager in tasting every pleasure Paris could afford and decency for his father's memory would allow. And Mrs. Hinton was engrossed in her millinery, her care for her personal appearance, and with wearying interviews with lawyers, trustees, and business of all sorts connected with her late husband's will. But in progress of time even those tiresome matters were in a fair way of settlement, and Adah Hinton began to feel that things were not quite so satisfactory as they might be.

One night, or morning rather—for the Colonel was a very late bird in his movements—when her brother and Robert came in, they found Mrs. Hinton sitting at the table in the dining-room with her handkerchief to her eyes.

“My dear Adah!” remonstrated the Colonel, while Robert felt very much ashamed of himself—“My dear girl! what *is* the matter that you are not in bed?”

“Why should I go to bed, Edward, when I cannot sleep?” she broke out rather passionately, while real tears came to her eyes; “you go out every day—you take my son from me to your horrid theatres and places—you leave me all alone to do my business and look after things—you neglect me in every way—you——”

She was gradually working herself up to a hysterical state—a thing the Colonel never could stand—so he promptly interfered:

"My dear, dear Adah! we never thought, I'm sure, of neglecting you. Did we, Robert?"

"Why no, mamma, I'm sure we did not; and I am very, very sorry we left you; but I thought, and Uncle Edward" (he always so spoke of him to his mother) "thought, we should be only in your way if we stopped in." His conscience really reproached him with neglect, though he only spoke the truth as to his ideas when leaving her.

"And I took Robert out because he was moping, poor fellow—for no other reason, Adah, upon my honour!" The Colonel's honour was a very elastic quality; besides, he could not afford to be on other than the best of terms with his sister, for more reasons than one. The Colonel was in a chronic state of "hard-upness;" had not a five-pound note he could call his own when he joined her in Paris; and as he had fully made up his mind to live with her—*on* her would have been the truer expression—and to act as "guide, philosopher, and friend" to Robert, he saw at once that any incipient disagreement must promptly be put a stop to.

"Upon my sacred honour, Adah, I had no other motive. You don't suppose a man like me cares for sight-seeing in Paris? Passed that stage long ago, my dear girl. But you are worried to death with those musty old law fellows; you are hipped and bored; you want distraction. What do the two of you say if we take a trip to one or other of the German watering-

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CHAPTER II.

A BROAD AND PLEASANT PATH.

"Now then, Adah—Robert—who's for the Trinkhalle?" asked the Colonel, entering their sitting-room in the Hôtel des Quatre Saisons at Wiesbaden, about a week after their arrival. Colonel Mervin had a great respect for his liver, and as that organ was in rather a disordered state after some years of anything but ascetic living, he was putting himself through a course of the waters with greater regularity than he had ever been known to do anything before. Adah Hinton had an idea that the draughts and baths might increase her good looks, so she too was a pretty constant attendant at the morning parade held about seven A.M. near the Kochbrünnen, and drank off her dose from the "boiling spring," as hot as ever she could bear it, taking her dip afterwards with the constancy of a devotee. Robert tasted it once—but never again. People said it bore a close resemblance to chicken-broth in flavour, but to him it tasted more like dirty ditch-water with a handful of salt mingled ; while the slimy appearance of the bath fairly disgusted him. However, he usually accompanied his mother and uncle to the promenade around the spring, and if he did not taste the nasty stuff, the fresh air and the early rising, with his natural tendencies as

a growing boy, gave him the same advantages as if he had—a rare appetite for breakfast.

“Who is that man, Edward?” asked Mrs. Hinton, as they met again after their bath, alluding to a dark handsome fellow of military appearance who had just left her brother’s side.

“That?—oh, that’s old Jack Plunger—a rare good fellow of my old regiment. I must introduce him. Bilious or something, and taking the waters.”

“Ask him to lunch, Edward; in a quiet way, you know; we want some one to meet Nettie Horsford besides ourselves.”

“For goodness sake, do. I hate that Miss Horsford,” added Robert, who was a sworn foe to the rather fast young lady his mother had pitched upon for her best friend *pro tem*.

“For shame, Robert; it is no reason because you are awkward—*gauche*, like all the boys of your age—that you should dislike Nettie.”

He was hurt at this rebuke of his mother’s. In the first place, he was not at all hobble-de-hoyish as yet; in the second, Miss Horsford tried to “chaff” him—a thing he never could bear; and in the third, he heard a good deal of gossip about her flirting disposition from stray acquaintances of his uncle’s, who were not at all reticent in their conversation, all which made him conclude the fair Nettie was not quite such an eligible companion for his mother as she might have chosen.

“Never mind it, old Rob,” said his uncle, affection-

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ately, as he lit a monstrous cigar, "your mother likes her, and that must be enough for you and me. Come along, Adah—it's time to get back—and I'll ask Jack when I meet him in the Kursaal at band time."

The luncheon was a great success. The Colonel had a special aptitude for cookery, and had struck up such an intimate friendship with the *chef* at the Quatre Saisons, that the table in their apartments was by far the best served in Wiesbaden. Mrs. Hinton had given him *carte blanche* as regarded their living, and Mervin was the last man in the world to neglect availing himself of that advantage. A dinner or lunch with the "Hintons," as their party was called, came to be looked upon as the best thing in the place; while, as a natural consequence, their circle of butterfly-friends was ever on the increase.

"Oh, you dreadful man! you surely do not play?" asked Nettie Horsford, as Jack Plunger recounted some of his experiences the previous night at the gambling salle in the Kursaal.

"Well, you can hardly call it play—just staking a few Napoleons—is it, Mervin?"

The Colonel laughed; he knew pretty well what Plunger's "few Napoleons" meant.

"Don't ask Colonel Mervin, Mr. Plunger," said Mrs. Hinton; "he is hopelessly gone that way himself."

She knew it to her cost; for *her* money, or Robert's rather, formed the staple of the Colonel's amusements.

"Yes," remarked Nettie Horsford, with a slight twinge of bitterness in her tone, for she knew that Mervin looked upon her as an interloper; "yes, I saw him lose pretty heavily the other night, though he didn't see me."

"I hadn't the pleasure, Miss Horsford; but I *think* you were at Homburg last August, were you not?" The Colonel spoke meaningly.

Miss Horsford looked very uncomfortable, and blushed a little as she replied—

"Yes, I was there; and what of it?"

"Oh, nothing; there's a table there too!"

"What are you going to do this evening, Mrs. Hinton?" put in Jack Plunger, to turn the conversation, which threatened to be unpleasant; and then the whole party set to discussing the various merits of a drive up the valley of the Tannus, or an excursion down to the Rhine at Biberich.

Thus the pleasant summer and autumn days absolutely flew away in a round of gaiety and pleasure. Every morning brought some new plan of amusement; every evening found Robert Hinton more and more charmed with an easy *débonnaire* existence, whose vital principle was enjoyment. A forenoon spent lounging in the handsome reading-room over a book of travel, or, most often, a novel; an hour in the gay colonnades of the Kursaal, where seemed to be gathered together all the most beautiful things of the earth; a lunch fit for the tables of Lucullus; riding, driving, exploring,

or visiting one or other of the hundreds of interesting places in the neighbourhood, filled up the afternoon admirably; dinner, either at their hotel or at the *table d'hôte*, introduced him to an ever-varying kaleidoscopic view of the men and women of nearly every nation in the world; a lounge in the Kursaal gardens to sip ices, smoke, and listen to the glorious music of one of the best bands in Europe till darkness set in, when the many twinkling lights amongst the profuse foliage gave the whole scene a romantic and fairy-like character; a visit to the theatre with Mervin and some of his jolly companions; or a walk into the Salle, where gambling for whole fortunes went on eternally, and all the passions of all the nations of the earth, and of both sexes, came out in their nakedness—these things, fascinating and tempting, with all the power of novelty and never-ceasing change, went to make up the “life” that Robert Hinton was only too much charmed with; a “life” that drew him more and more into its deadly embraces as day followed day, as night followed night, into the eternity of time.

“I say, Rob, old man,” said the Colonel hastily one night as he met his nephew lounging into the Salle to watch the gamblers, “I want you to come here a moment. Jove, I’m in such a fix!”

“What’s wrong, Mervin? Your liver bothering you again?”

The lad had picked up an affected *sang-froid*, which he produced on every occasion.

“Liver, no! But confound it, I’ve dropped a lot of money, nearly cleaned out, and I want you—fresh blood, they say, always wins—just to stake a Nap. or two for me; will you?”

He had never asked his nephew to play before. Heartless man of the world as he was, he avoided placing such a devilish temptation as that before him; but now all mercy was cast to the winds; he had lost every fraction he had but four or five Napoleons; his sister had warned him that morning that she would keep him as long as he liked, but would give him no more ready money, and in desperation he took to the last resource of the gambler, and begged this “fresh hand” to stake for him in hopes that the luck would turn.

The luck *did turn*; Robert, who, a month or two before, would have as soon cut off his right hand as have gambled for himself or any one else, entered now (so far had he travelled along the broad and pleasant path that leads to destruction) with zest into the spirit of play. He staked wildly, rashly, and without thought, just as the humour seized him; he flushed a brilliant red with the intense eagerness this new-found excitement evolved, and every time he staked he won! Old players, old losers, watched him and envied him with the envy of ghouls; fair women and honest men, who came but for a passing glance at the horrors of the saloon, shuddered when they saw the heat with which he clutched the gold as it was raked towards him, and

many pitied him from their souls as they heard the hurried, half-fearing laugh with which he refused to listen to his uncle's directions, and insisted on playing just as his fancy led him.

"Enough, Robert; for God's sake, stop! we've done enough for one night," entreated Colonel Mervin, as he saw how the bystanders were noticing the boy, and knew it would be all over the town the next morning. But still he went on and on, until sheer weariness forced him to leave off. Colonel Mervin went to bed that night the owner of far more pounds than he had been master of for many a long day.

The next morning Robert woke with flurried blood and an aching head, to receive a letter that had just come for him. It was from Twysdale, complaining bitterly that previous letters had remained unnoticed; that their friendship seemed to be dissolving; that he feared "the world" and "life" had made his friend their victim; and entreating that he would pause, if indeed he had got on the wrong track, and consider well with himself if true happiness and true pleasure did not lie in calm study and preparation for the serious storms of life.

"A parcel of old woman's twaddle!" answered he, as he tossed the letter contemptuously across his bed to his uncle, who had come to talk and glory over the success of the previous night, and asked "Who was his correspondent?"

"Twaddle indeed!" said the Colonel, rolling the

letter up into a spill to light his early cigar with ; “the fellow must be right when he says at the end that he is ill, and fears he is going to have a fever,” and he laughed as at a good joke. At breakfast Mrs. Hinton, wickered from mere idleness and ignorance and carelessness, actually congratulated her son on his conquest, the particulars of which she had heard at the Trinkhalle.

“Why, Robert, dear,” she said, “you’ll break the bank if you go on that way—be quite the hero of Wiesbaden !”

That day had been fixed upon for an excursion to the Pfahlgraben, or remains of the ancient Roman wall, some few miles away from the town, and a right jovial party it turned out to be. After lunch the ladies retired for rest, and the Major took the opportunity for his usual afternoon “forty winks.” The other men of the party lounged lazily, smoked, or played *écarté*, and Robert, took the opportunity to scribble a rough letter to Twysdale *en blague*. The composition was almost heartless ; he ridiculed his friend’s old-world notions of study, calm, &c., &c. ; and the dry cynical laugh that had sounded under the beech-trees of the old school, seemed to echo now in every sentence of his letter. The path was broad and pleasant indeed, and Robert Hinton was near its fatal end !

That night he played again, and won again. The third night the same ; men began to back his luck ; and when they did so, they too won. The fourth night

there was an immense gathering to witness and follow his play, the managers of the table began to look very serious, and on the fifth night his winnings attained to such a sum that they refused to play, and the game was stopped!

"Broke the bank, by Jove!" shouted the Colonel, in a high state of excitement; and a wild scream—it could not be called cheer—of delight rose from the warm gamesters and general bad characters who had lost their thousands to the inexorable *croupiers*. Colonel Mervin—for it was all his money, and Robert refused to touch a farthing of it—was the winner of an immense sum, and proposed to his sister the next morning that he and Robert should take a run over to London.

"Just for a change, Adah; besides, I have some securities I want to realise with this money."

The easy-going mother gave her consent, and in thirty-six hours or so, uncle and nephew were safe in London.

Partly out of bravado, partly because a reaction had set in, Robert Hinton, a day or two after their arrival, announced his intention of going down to Kings Beeches. The Colonel decidedly objected; but his nephew had a strong will of his own and could assert it, so Mervin gave in with the best grace he could. But he was determined not to let Robert altogether out of his clutches, and went down with him. When they arrived at the College they were met with the (for Robert) astounding intelligence

that Twysdale had caught the small-pox, had been at once removed to a vacant cottage some distance off, and was in the most imminent danger of his life!

They went back to the King's Rest in Pitchcot, where Robert immediately commenced to pack up all his things that had been taken from his portmanteau.

"That's right, Robert; the sooner we are out of this dangerous hole the better," said the Colonel, who had a mortal terror of the disease.

"I'm going over to help to nurse Twysdale," was the self-possessed answer.

"To nurse Twysdale! Are you mad? Do you know what small-pox is?"

"Perfectly well, Mervin; but I shall go for all that."

"But I forbid you, Robert; I—your uncle."

"Forbid if it pleases you; but I shall go all the same."

There was a regular "blow-up" between the two; but the Colonel got the worst of it, and went back to London in sore annoyance. Robert Hinton took up his abode with the two hospital-nurses that had been sent down to tend his stricken friend, and was gratefully received by the lonely women, whom no one else (so great was the dread of small-pox in the neighbourhood) would go near.

Slowly the fell disease ran its appointed course, and

Twysdale hovered between life and death. From the first, almost, old Squills, from Pitchcot, had given the patient up; but the family had sent the best possible advice from London; every second day the doctor came down from town to see him; and at last he gave to Robert and the nurses the gratifying news that there was a fair chance of recovery. During those anxious days of watching, Robert had turned most of his thoughts inwards; he examined himself and his late life thoroughly; he began to see the folly, the falseness, the hollowness, the positive wickedness, of the life he had been led into so willingly; he followed his own criminal thoughts step by step as they had led him into what were undoubtedly criminal actions; he compared his own recent career with the pure, steadfast, self-denying course of his friend who lay dying, for aught he knew, under his very eyes; all the old talks, the old arguments, the old true examples that Twysdale had forced upon him during their companionship, came back to him with hundredfold weight and power; he saw the fearful danger he had been in, the temptations that had nearly snared him for ever; the scales of worldly pleasure, forgetfulness of God, pride, vanity, and wicked self-will fell from his eyes, and when Twysdale woke to consciousness and power of comprehension, he found by his side a friend who had encountered fierce temptation and nobly conquered it. For his conversion to good was complete; every effort that man could make, his uncle made to drag

him back into the loathsome slime he had escaped from; even his own mother came down to Kings Beeches to implore of him to return to the world in which she said he was destined to shine and make a name for himself; but he steadfastly refused, and when Twysdale was able to be removed, he went away with him to Jersey for some months, and there, in the society of a truly good and noble soul, he riveted and clinched those resolutions that were made by his friend's bedside.

They read together, they studied together, they improved one another in every way; but Twysdale was the stay, Hinton the bending mast that required support. For it must not be supposed that a human being can turn steadfastly to good at a jump. Good ideas may come suddenly, and should be seized just as suddenly; but it takes time and care and constant watchfulness to turn them into good actions of lasting value, and the saying, "Rome was not built in a day," is true of nothing so much as of building up a sound, steady character and love of virtue that will last a lifetime. Robert Hinton had many and many a fierce struggle with his wild, wayward nature, but eventually he conquered, and became even as his friend—calm, equable, and strong for all good.

Should you happen to go down to one of the pleasantest of our inland watering-places this year, you will find there an excellent and admirably conducted grammar-school of ancient date. Ask for the Principal,

and in the mild, kind, and yet dignified gentleman (whose handsome face bears marks of many an inward battle with self), you will find Robert Hinton. Twysdale is the name of the rector of the parish.





Story the Fifth.

A BIRTHDAY MEMORY.

CHAPTER I.

A JOLLY LARK!

GEOFFREY and Arthur Normadale were two of the best-liked fellows that ever went to Kings Beeches. Their father was a country gentleman of long descent, and one of the most honourable and upright representatives of his rank in life. Their mother had died when Geoffrey was seven years old and Arty little more than a baby, so that their early training had been confided of necessity to a lady, who from a reverse of fortune was obliged to earn a livelihood by the care of children. Not that she was a governess in the ordinary acceptance of the term—Mr. Normadale being indeed a distant relation of hers—but she was engaged to look after and partly instruct the two boys and their sister (who was a year older

than Geoffrey), and well did she perform her task. Two more gentlemanly boys it would be hard to find anywhere than the young Normadales, while their sister was noted for that calm, unassuming manner indicative of the well-trained English girl.

At the time this "Memory" refers to, Geoffrey was tolerably well advanced in Upper boys, while Arty—who was somewhat backward at book learning, though sharp as a needle in other things—was, taking his age into consideration, rather far down in the list of Lowers. There were great differences between the two. Geoffrey was sedate, composed, and slow in both thought and action; he was gentle and kind as a lamb, and yet full of courage without any outward display of it; he was generous almost to a fault, but no unnecessary spendthrift on either himself or on others; there was an entire absence of recklessness or love of dissipation; he had no desire in life but to follow the quiet career of a country gentleman, as his father had done before him; and the principal feature, that was not a negative, in his character was a love for field sports and for English out-door games and pastimes, at all of which he was an adept; for the rest, his intellect was but mediocre, he was neither very clever nor very dull, and his love of reading was neither earnest nor profound. Arty, on the other hand, was warm and choleric; his great desire was for stirring scenes and adventure; he was lavish in his outlay—caring little how or on whom his money was squandered as long as he could get what he

called "fun" out of the expenditure; he was very talented at everything but book learning, which he both despised and disliked; and almost the only point of resemblance between the brothers was in their common love of sporting—with this difference, that while Geoffrey loved it for itself, Arty only enjoyed it for the opportunities it gave for encountering adventurous risks. They were both honourable; but while honour was a passion—a religion—with Geoffrey, with Arty it was only an ordinary attribute of the English boy, and was liable to bend, or even to break, under extreme pressure. They were fond of one another, but it was in a quiet undemonstrative sort of way, and certainly no one could accuse them of any undue or too open display of affection.

Geoffrey shared a tolerably large room in what is known as Grecians' Grove—a somewhat fantastic title, whose origin is lost in the mists of antiquity—with Charley Belmour (whose story will be found further on), and with Arty, who, though a Lower, was, by the special request of Mr. Normadale, who desired the more sedate to keep an eye on the wilder brother, allowed to occupy a bed in Geoffrey's apartment. Their room was a pleasant corner one, with windows at right angles to one another, that in front looking to the south, up the undulating lawn and winding avenue, and that at the side over the fields in the direction of a farmstead whose tenant was at constant war with the Kings Beeches boys.

"And you really mean to do it, Arty?" asked Murty O'Donnell, a wild Irish chap always up to fun and mischief.

"Of course I do; did you ever know me to turn back when once I set my mind on anything? It will be a jolly lark, and the best way to keep my birthday."

"Oh, don't think I'd be the one to spoil sport. Show me a decent game and I'm safe to join you, my boy."

"Well, then, shall we ask leave to go to Pitchcot, or go without?" asked Arty. "You know I'll want a whole lot of things."

"We can ask leave first. I'll make a good excuse, never fear; and sure it'll be only time to take leg-bail and slip out without it when we are refused. The nights are fine and warm now, and we'll never be missed after 'names' at bedtime."

"It's lucky I got that old lock unscrewed last night; we should never have been able to manage the things over the wall."

"No; it's well you thought of it. Let us be off and ask Torrens for leave now. There he is, talking to Red Weskit, and that's a born sign he's in a good temper."

It was late in the afternoon of a half-holiday that the two were discussing their plan, and the mid-August twilight was just setting in as they went up the avenue and disappeared over the crest of the hill;

taking, when they reached it, the road that led to Pitchcot. It was quite dark when they got back, and as the doors on their own side were shut, they had to enter by the one under the supervision of Peter Westcott.

"Well, Master Normadale, this is a pretty hour to come back—eh?"

"Oh, but, Peter, we had leave to go to Pitchcot, and there was a fair or something, and we were delayed."

"Humph! a fair, indeed; and what did you go for?"

"A few things we had leave to buy, of course," answered Murty O'Donnell, who was never at a loss for an answer, even though he had to sacrifice truth to procure one, and produced a small parcel as witness to his answer.

"The avenue and road must be as dry as a bone now," still further objected Peter, "and your boots are wet and muddy; how's that?"

The two boys looked at their boots in some dismay.

"I'm sure I don't know——"

"But I do," broke in Murty; "it was crossing that place near the duck-pond."

Not that it was anything of the sort; but Murty did not care to tell how they came home, for a reason of their own, through Farmer Hanwell's land, and as Peter appeared satisfied, they went off to the play-room without further questioning.

"Well, did you manage it?" asked Charley Bel-

mour, a wiry, muscular chap, in as hard condition as he need be to run a race for his life, and with a peculiarly keen, eager face.

"Yes, we settled everything," answered Arty, who was quietly changing his muddy boots in a corner; "brought some of the things with us, and left them—"

"Hush; don't even whisper it. Did you get my horsehair?"

"We did; and precious queer old Goody Tandy looked when we asked her for it!"

"Ah, she didn't know you. She wouldn't look queer at me, I bet."

Belmour was a perfect maniac for sporting of all kinds, and snared many a fine jack in the course of a twelvemonth.

"Well, here it is. Don't stand about so, or fellows will notice you; and mind you have one of the biggest for us. Whisper a moment," and they conferred in secret.

"Delaville; I say, Del, I want you," and Murty O'Donnell caught hold of a brisk, bright, eager-eyed fellow who was running past him in the large school-room.

"Yes; what is it? Be quick; I'm in such a hurry to catch old Torrens and say an imposition to him now that he is half asleep—he never catches me looking over the book then, and I don't know a line of it!" and he burst into a hearty laugh.

"Oh, bother Torrens! I'll tell you something

better than all the impositions in the school. But will you join us? and will you promise—on your honour, now—not to hint it to a human being?”

“Dost doubt thy bosom friend?” declaimed the theatrically-disposed Delaville. “Perish the thought! Nay, am I not always truest of the true to my own Prince of Connaught, Murty O'Donnell?”

“Oh, bosh, Del! stop that rubbish or I'll not tell you at all—and it's the best thing of the whole year—the very best that ever happened, or is going to happen, at Kings Beeches.”

“I swear! Friend, thou hast mine ear; pour thy dulcet discourse softly and trippingly therein.”

“Very well; you *won't* stop that balderdash, so I shan't tell you and you won't come.”

“I *will* be drowned and nobody *shall* save me!” muttered Delaville. “Well, but, Murty, don't go, there's a good fellow. Look, I'm quite serious now, 'pon my honour I am, and I won't whisper it to a living soul.”

Thus adjured, Murty O'Donnell turned round again, and the two retired to a corner, where they whispered, and laughed, and planned until the great bell rang at nine o'clock for bedtime.

It was a lovely warm night just a week afterwards, and Geoffrey Normadale leaned for some time out of his bedroom window, enjoying the darkness (there was no moon) and the quiet after the turmoil of the day.

It was Arty's birthday—a day that ought, according to the elder brother's ideas, to have been one of calm enjoyment, and yet it had not quite been so. There had been fond letters from home, and presents, and kind wishes; but Arty had hardly seemed to care for any of them, was flushed, excited, and appeared as if some engrossing thought occupied his brain, while it was evident his mind was very far away during the jolly afternoon game of cricket that the elder brother had enjoyed so much. In fact, Geoffrey had thought at one time that some mischief was afloat; that Arty and his not very eligible friend, Murty O'Donnell, were engaged in one of their wild schemes; but now that anxiety was gone, and his younger brother was snoring loudly in his bed. Charley Belmour was also giving oral evidences of sound slumber, and that reminded Geoffrey that he, too, was pretty well tired out with the day's cricketing, so he slipped off his clothes, and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

“Hist! Arty!” softly whispered Belmour, gently raising his head from the pillow. Arty Normadale put his forefinger to his lips in mute reply, and very gently and cautiously crept out of bed. He dressed himself, all but his boots, without a sound, placed his top-coat under the bedclothes so as to somewhat resemble a sleeping figure, and then noiselessly tip-toed out of the room, the well-oiled lock giving to his hand without the slightest grating. Belmour followed his example, and in three minutes the two lads were

standing in the darkest corner of a little yard on the ground floor that opened on to the playground.

"I wish to goodness Murty and Del would come," whispered Arty. The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the two named came stealing down the stone staircase that led from their dormitory, and were cautiously greeted by the others.

"'Tis now the very witching time of night, when churchyards yawn, and——"

"Hold your stupid tongue, you donkey; it's not ten yet," interrupted Belmour, who had not a spice of poetry in his composition, and besides, never could understand Delaville's quotations.

"Hush, hush! we will be heard," said Murty O'Donnell warningly, as he proceeded to help Arty to unscrew the lock from the door leading out into the open. The lock came off in their hands; then the two went into the building again, drew from a disused locker under the stairs a large hamper, which the other two took away, accompanied by Murty as a guide, Arty remaining to loosely screw on the lock again; and when that was accomplished, he made for a remote angle of the wall, which, with the aid of a couple of climbing-irons (the holes for which were already made), he easily scaled, and then hastened to join his comrades, who were sneaking along in the shade in the direction of Farmer Hanwell's grounds. Once out of the school bounds, the whole party became as merry as grigs, and as fearless as utterly reckless folks usually

are ; but the courage was to some extent of the Dutch breed, a little wine having been served out to each by Murty from a bottle he took out of his pocket. Changing the hamper from one to another every now and then, they made rapidly for a sort of outlying stackyard that lay at a considerable distance from the farmstead, in which there stood an empty cattle-house surrounded by stacks of old hay of the previous season. Arty unlocked the door with a false key he had provided, and the whole party entered. A match was speedily struck (there were no windows), four candles were lighted, Murty and Arty produced dried wood from a corner in which they had previously stored it, and soon a glorious fire was sparkling and crackling on the rude hearth.

“Now then, Del, you and Belmour must set to work with the birds and the fish,” said Arty, who was bustling about amongst pots and pans and a gridiron they had brought from Pitchcot ; while Murty commenced to “lay the table,” as he called it—in other words, to get knives, forks, crockery, &c., in order in a clean corner.

“By Jove, this is stunning fun !” said Delaville, as he commenced to prepare a brace of already plucked partridges that Arty had managed to smuggle out of a poacher, who was netting them before the season ; while Belmour scientifically opened a fine jack of his own poaching, and got it ready for the gridiron. Arty Normadale then opened a fresh bottle of wine, “just to



THE SCENE OF THE SUPPER.

set them going," he said, and they all boisterously drank success to his birthday supper.

Then such cooking, stewing, frying, and operating of all sorts took place! Arty was major-domo and superintended the whole; but Belmour and Murty were the best *chefs*, while Delaville, it was found, could only be trusted with the rudest part of the work. About midnight everything was ready, and after a rough scrub down, and another refreshing glass of wine, the party sat down to a rattling good supper, that tasted all the sweeter from having been cooked by their own hands. There was a ready-dressed knuckle of ham and a pair of fowls, a cold roast duck and a piece of tongue; the jack (grilled), which was voted superb; the brace of untimely partridges, that Belmour had artistically spatchcocked; a splendid dish of fried potatoes, the production of Murty O'Donnell; and a general *omnium gatherum* of cheese, tarts, pies, cakes, and apples, that made up altogether the most glorious feed that hungry and excited boys could desire. The wine was abundant, and, strange to say, very good; and when the heavier portion of the banquet had been removed by the active Murty, Arty Normadale got up mysteriously, fumbled for a while in a corner of the cattle manger, and produced two bottles of real champagne. In that wine his health was drunk with the greatest enthusiasm, and the fun grew fast and furious during the small hours of the night, until Belmour looked at his watch and found that it must be nearly daybreak. The four

jumped to their feet, and commenced to stow away the things in their hiding-places—they were perhaps just a trifle unsteady or over-excited—and putting in the hamper only those articles it was absolutely necessary to take back, they kicked the fire out, and made the best of their way home. Just as Arty had screwed on the lock again, and all was safe, the day began to grow grey in the east, and they sneaked up again to bed, and were in a few seconds all asleep.

CHAPTER II.

ITS CONSEQUENCES.

GEOFFREY NORMADALE awoke that morning rather earlier than was his wont, and after a good yawn and a limb-rending stretch, got out of bed to look what sort of a day the dull grey mist presaged. As he looked he thought he heard hoarse shouting and cries away to his right. He rapidly passed to the other window, threw it up, and saw, to his horror, a distant rick-yard of Farmer Hanwell's on fire.

"Hullo, you fellows! Arty—Belmour—jump up—here's old Hanwell's haystacks all in a blaze!" he shouted; but the two, tired out, and perhaps a little stupefied with the wine they had taken, did not stir hand or foot till he ran over and shook them vigorously.

"What?" they both cried in dismay, when they comprehended him. Geoffrey saw, but did not particularly heed, a quick glance of unbounded astonishment and fright that passed from one to the other, but he *did* notice that they both turned deadly pale as they jumped out of bed and rushed to the window.

"My heavens! what can it mean?" hoarsely stammered out Arty, as he at once recognised the rick-yard where their orgy had been held. Belmour said not a

word, but he gripped the window-frame till his nervous grasp nearly forced it out.

"Mean?" echoed Geoffrey in some disdain of the evident nervousness of the two; "why it means that the whole place will be probably burnt to the ground, and the old man half ruined. But, Jove! it's getting worse; some of us might help to pass buckets of water, or something. I'll go and rouse up some of the masters."

He ran away down Grecians' Grove towards masters' side, and the first man he encountered was Red Weskit, who, of course, had already an inkling of the news. Between them they woke up two or three of the masters, who speedily mustered all the Upper boys that were dressed—Belmour, for reasons best known to the reader and himself, was still in his night-shirt—and the whole body made in a smart trot for the burning premises. Lower boys thronged out on to the Ball Alley, to gape and wonder at the fire till they were called into morning study—the first calling-in that Murty O'Donnell, Delaville, and Arty Normadale had ever been grateful for. The latter was shocked beyond measure, and his pallid face would have told a tale had any one in the excitement cared to notice him. By half-past eight, the Uppers came thronging back with the news that the fire had nearly burnt itself out; that nothing could possibly be saved; that the origin of the fire was a perfect mystery; and—oh! what a sigh of wicked relief went up from the hearts of

three of the hearers!—that the cattle-shed was burnt to the very ground. Thus all traces of their guilty action were happily destroyed, and they had at least a little time before them to think on what they should do.

“Was Hanwell insured?” asked one of the masters who had not gone with the party.

“Only his hayricks; and those not to their full value. Poor old chap, he will lose a lot of money over them and his cattle-sheds!” answered Geoffrey, little knowing that he was, by his words, driving a dagger into his brother’s breast. Conscious of guilt as they were, the four roysterers of the previous evening felt a perfect dread of being seen in one another’s company, and save for a passing sentence or gesture of silence and caution, not a word passed between them. Murty O’Donnell suffered least of any of them, as his conscience was none of the most tender; Delaville looked upon the affair much as he would on a touching scene in a play, which he was powerless to alter or remove; and Belmour was sincerely sorry for what had occurred, without taking any active blame to himself, though had he examined a little closer he must have become perfectly well aware that no one could possibly have caused the fire but his comrades and himself. On Arty Normadale—the promoter of the whole affair, the chief actor in it, and “the founder of the feast”—the blow fell with fearful and well-deserved severity.

“Hullo! why what’s the matter, Arty?” asked Geof-

frey that afternoon as he entered his room for something, and found his brother writhing on his bed in an agony of remorse. Arty had begged leave to go up-stairs on the plea of being unwell, praying from the bottom of his heart that Geoffrey would hear nothing of it, and would not enter their apartment until bedtime.

"Nothing, Geoff—a bad headache," prevaricated Arty; "I think I have a cold coming on."

So he had perhaps, but it certainly was unknown to himself.

"But—eh? I say, Arty, what are you blubbering for? Do tell me what's wrong."

Still Arty persisted that there was nothing the matter; but he looked so woe-begone and wretched through the mental pain occasioned by the result of his own wild folly, that his brother became alarmed.

"I'm afraid, Art, you're sickening for a fever or something; I shall go and ask Mr. Torrens to send for 'old Squills'—that was the nickname of the Pitchcot doctor—"to see you and prescribe;" and he rose to leave the room.

"Oh, Geoff, for Heaven's sake don't," cried Arty, in wild terror of being found out; "for pity's sake, do not—I am quite well, and——"

"Quite well, Arty? That is absurd," replied the other, very gravely; "you are not yourself at all, and unless you give me some idea of what really is wrong, I must have advice for you."

Arty *could* not tell for a long time; at length, the

evident determination of his brother to call in assistance frightened him so thoroughly, that, with many a groan and writhing of mental torture, he blurted out a mangled history of that fatal supper, to the intense astonishment and horror of his elder brother. One thing was very plain to Geoffrey: the Principal or their father must be at once made aware of the whole affair, for the honour of the family was involved in saving from pain and actual loss this poor old farmer, who was suffering so deeply through the misconduct of Arthur. Geoffrey was half stunned with the disclosure: he could not but look on his only brother in the light of an incendiary—a felon! It was criminal to break into the farmer's house—cattle-house though it was; it was criminal to burn up his wood and hay to light their fire as they had done; and surely it was deeply criminal to carelessly, recklessly scatter that fire about, and thus burn down his whole property. He urged Arty to get up from the bed in which he was rolling in bitterly deserved distress, and go with him at once to make a full confession to the Principal; but that his brother, point-blank, and with great determination, refused to do. He said that he could not and that he would not; that he was bound in honour to the others not to tell.

“In honour!” snorted out honest Geoffrey; “pretty honour when you burn down a man's property—rob him of, perhaps, a whole year's savings.”

“Rob him?”

"Yes, rob him—that's the fair way to put it—the only plain English way. You must at once come and tell——"

"I cannot," answered the other doggedly.

Geoffrey did not know what to do. He tried every art of persuasion, but he entirely failed in his object.

"This is silly, cruel, and—yes, I must say it—cowardly trifling, and conduct I never expected to find in any fellow that bears the name of Normadale."

Arty writhed again when he heard the dreadful word "cowardly" applied to him; but still he would not tell.

"Well, there is only one thing left for me to do. I shall give you one hour exactly; in the meantime I shall not breathe a word of this to any one; and if then you still persist in keeping the thing a secret, I shall do what I think is right and honourable."

There was no mistaking the determination in Geoffrey's eye as he left the room, and Arty felt, if possible, even far more miserable than before.

For a stricken hour did the elder brother pace firmly, buried in deep thought, up and down the Beeches Walk; and it would not be too much to say that for the whole of those sixty minutes his mind never once wandered away from his brother. He hoped against hope that Arty would give in and confess; Geoffrey did not see how, as a boy of honour, he could do otherwise. But what if he would not? Arty was

unaccountably obstinate in some things—more especially in what he considered as honourable towards worthless comrades; and what if this affair was one of his pig-headed fancies? He, Geoffrey, could see plainly enough that the “honour” in this case lay all the other way; that honour absolutely compelled him to take instant measures for relieving the mind of poor old Hanwell and confessing all, and seeing that compensation was at once made; but it was quite possible that Arty would still hold to his own mistaken view; and then what was the right course to pursue? He had every desire in life to screen his brother; to get him out of the dilemma if he possibly could; to save him from pain, punishment, and shame, and to lead him to better things by affection and sympathy; but how could he do the former things, and yet behave justly and honourably to old Farmer Hanwell? Geoffrey told himself, with a deep sigh of pain, that the things were incompatible, yet still he was in a fix as to the right course of action. He could not write to his father to pay this money without explaining all; the sum was too large, and the request would be preposterous; and if he explained what it was wanted for, it would place Arty in a far worse position than ever—that of a culprit who would not confess his crime. Then he had a long struggle. Duty and honour thundered to his mind that he must tell all about it; mercy and affection prayed him to withhold the information.

The hour was up, and he went back to Arty, only to

find him just as obstinate on the point as he had feared.

"For the last time, then, Arty, will you not do what is only just, and come with me to the Principal?"

"No, Geoffrey, I will not," was the sullen determined answer.

"Then I must go myself," and, with a deep sigh and a heavy heart, the elder brother went away into masters' side to perform the most unpleasant duty that had yet come before him.

Slowly, and with bated breath, he told the tale imperfectly as he knew it, portioning the blame just as Arty had portioned it—the greater part on himself; and Geoffrey almost broke down when he came to tell of his brother's remorse without repentance, and of his utterly mistaken notions of honour. The Principal heard him out to the end without interruption, unless a gasp or two of astonishment and horror at the proceedings, and of deep wonder as to how the four managed to get to the hut at all, could be taken as such; and when the whole tale, so far at least as Geoffrey knew, was unfolded, he still sat in his great chair unable to find adequate words to express his sentiments.

"And you have no idea, Normadale, how these wicked lads managed to get out of the house?"

Geoffrey had not, and if he had he would not have told it, for that was certainly no part of his duty.

"Have you ever missed your brother before? or Belmour?"

"I have not, sir; nor have I any reason for thinking they have before left the room at night."

The Principal then thanked him warmly for what he had done in going straight there with the news; promised to go over to Hanwell's at once and give him just such a mere inkling of the truth as would soothe the old man's mind; and bestowed on Geoffrey the highest personal praise for his straightforward and honourable conduct in the whole affair. But, he said, the case was far too serious to be dealt with off-hand, and he took a willing promise from Geoffrey that not one syllable of it should pass his lips until Mr. Normadale and the fathers of the other boys had been communicated with. It did not improve Master Arty's peace of mind when he learned the upshot of his brother's interview with the Principal, but he was at least glad to know that steps would be certainly taken to reimburse Hanwell for any loss he had sustained.

Mr. Normadale came down to Kings Beeches at once on receipt of the news, and after a long consultation with the Principal and his eldest son, determined to withdraw Arty from the school at once, and thus save the pain and exposure of a public investigation into the conduct of all four lads. A cheque was sent to Farmer Hanwell to cover all possible loss he might have sustained, and Arty left Kings Beeches for ever without having an opportunity of saying one word to any of his companions; but, to Geoffrey's great delight, his mind veered round to the proper quarter, and he *now*

acknowledged that true honour should have impelled him at once, on learning of the fire, to tell all he knew of it to the Principal. No public *exposé* took place, and until this is in type but few Old Beeches will have any idea of the true story of the burning down of Farmer Hanwell's rick-yard. The other three bacchanals were all very severely punished by their parents in vacation time; but as a threat of being expelled was held over their heads in case they told anything of what they had done, the whole affair was easily hushed up and idle curiosity put an end to.

Geoffrey Normadale was High Sheriff for his county a few years back; he fills the position of his father, with the most excellent opinions from all sides, and his character cannot be excelled in England by that of any other high-minded and useful country gentleman. With Arty it was found that absolutely nothing could be done at home. He was always in hot water one way or another; the blood in his veins seemed hotter than that of ordinary mortals, and at last his father acceded to his wishes, and sent him to America—with only a very modest sum of money—to seek fortune or adventure, or perhaps both. He soon squandered every penny he had. Mr. Normadale firmly refused to supply him with any more, and Arty had to set to work *to earn by head and hand* that livelihood which would have been more than amply provided for him at home had he only seen fit to behave himself. His father's conduct was the right, indeed the only, course

that could be adopted with effect, and several years of real "roughing," and suffering, and privation, made a man of one who otherwise would have been a useless nuisance on the earth. He now owns one of the largest sheep runs in Australia.





Story the Sixth.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

THE Rev. Eldred Gurgoyne sat in his chamber in the growing twilight of a dull December day, meditating on the thriving prospects of a little experiment he was trying amongst some of the best-disposed of the Kings Beeches boys. In the school he filled with great ability the post of chief professor of Greek, and was noted not only there, but in learned circles in general, as being one of the ablest hands, taking his youth (for he was only about thirty years of age) into due consideration, at digging up the roots of that dead language. His physical qualifications were not at all on a par with his scholarly abilities; in person he was feeble, excessively short-sighted, and slightly deaf; while, except at disinterring the aforesaid roots, his mental power was, to say the least, a decidedly inferior quality. Any lad of average

smartness could "do" him, as the saying went, and he had been known to innocently receive the same imposition half-a-dozen times running, and never detect the fraud that was being passed on him.

A knock came at his door.

"Come in!" said Mr. Gurgoyle cheerfully, as he roused himself from his contemplation. The door opened, and in walked a lad of pleasing if rather demure countenance, who at once walked over and reverently shook the proffered hand of his preceptor.

"Well, Isaac, a little before your time? Where are the others?"

"Yes, sir," answered Isaac Snell, a leading fellow amongst a certain class of Lower boys, as he took the chair pointed out to him; "I'm a little early, I know, but I wanted to have a private word or two with you before the others joined us." Amongst his companions Isaac was noted for silence and contemplation of the doings and sayings of others, rather than for any demonstrativeness on his own part; indeed he had gained the rather unpleasant character of being sly when he first joined the school, but he had outlived the calumny, and for the last few years had won golden opinions from masters, and respect if not affection from the greater portion of his comrades, on account of his solid perseverance in all the ways of good and his real piety, which was as free from prominence on the one hand as it was from concealment on the other. He was not ashamed to say his prayers more regularly

than most others, nor was he vain or boastful of doing so, and thus he succeeded in hitting off the happy mean which is certain in the long run to be appreciated. He was neither much liked nor disliked, admired or run down by his companions—unobtrusive goodness seldom is—and he pursued the even tenor of his way without attracting undue notice one way or the other. But with Mr. Gurgoyle he was far more intimate than with any other being at the Beeches. To him he told all his mental troubles, his doubts on this question or that, his religious difficulties of every sort, until between the two there came to exist that close bond of union which is the outcome of religious intercommunion. Of late Isaac had been doing, in a very quiet way, a real good in the school. He had with much hesitation mentioned to Mr. Gurgoyle the desire he and one or two others had for weekly meetings of a religious character; the former was delighted with the suggestion, and at once insisted that the little band should assemble in his chambers to carry out their intention, while he himself gladly conducted their exercises, praising Isaac till the boy became quite confused for originating such an idea. The object of the consultation just now was one Johnny Horton, a lad of rather luxurious ideas regarding food, who had been more than once in hot water regarding missing pats of butter and basins of sugar from masters' table when Peter Westcott happened to doze in the den, and Isaac gave Mr. Gurgoyle the pleasing intelligence that he thought

he had made a good impression on him, and hoped to bring him to their meetings before long.

"But you were not at one time very good friends, were you, Isaac?"

"No, sir, not when we were in Small boys" (the last three forms were so spoken of), "but latterly Horton has been coming round, and now I think we can—we can perhaps——"

"Out with it, Isaac," said the master, smiling.

"We may, I hope, *convert* him!" with a strong emphasis on the last word but one.

Mr. Gurgoyle was delighted, and they talked over the matter for some little time, agreeing that steps must be taken most cautiously, as Johnny was a difficult subject—almost a dangerous one, Isaac said—to deal with. Three or four other lads then entered the room, and the usual prayers, reading, according to the routine of their little gathering, were edifyingly engaged in. After that it was usual to have some sober chat over the domestic occurrences of the school, and then the lads retired. This evening Bobby Rose at once announced—it had been burning on his tongue all through prayer-time—that George Haxell, an Upper who had a room to himself in Grecians' Grove, had missed, just before they came up, a handsome ring from a box in his room which he had unfortunately left unlocked that morning.

"Such a lark it was!" Bobby—who was of rather a jovial and funny tendency—was going on to say, when Mr. Gurgoyle interrupted:

"Don't say that, Robert ; it is of the gravest import that a thief should be amongst us—a thing to weep rather than laugh over."

Isaac Snell looked horrified when he heard the news.

"It is so unusual—so sudden ; what can have induced any one to commit such a crime ?" He seemed to think a moment, and then went on, "Should we not, dear Mr. Gurgoyne, should we not pray that the robber be found out ?"

"Let us rather pray that he repent," said the master.

"I'd vote to give him a good thrashing all the same, if he's found out," remarked Bobby Rose, who was decidedly the most "practical" Christian of the party.

"You should forgive him," half-whispered Paul Davis, whose modesty always kept him in the background ; but Mr. Gurgoyne's suggestion was taken, and after special prayer for the culprit, the party broke up.

There was a good deal of agitation in the play-room that night, for of late these petty thefts had been too common to be pleasant, and threats were loudly uttered that the culprit should have such a public thrashing as never before was known when caught. And caught every one was determined he should be, if watching could do it ; but the eagerness and buzz helped to defeat its own end, as of course the thief was amongst themselves, and heard all the plans that were laid for

his capture. Not that this was a "petty" theft by any means; the ring that Haxell had lost was of considerable value; and though, of course, he was never allowed to wear it at school, he regretted its loss exceedingly, because it was a parting present from his parents, who were in Australia. The other Grecians, many of whom had pins, rings, chains, &c., worth money, determined to be cautious with their things in future, and a general lock-up took place that very evening.

"This is a very serious matter, very serious indeed, Peter," said Dr. King (he was the Principal when this event happened), talking over the matter next day with Red Weskit; "I suppose you have no idea—no suspicions?"

"None whatever, Doctor," was the answer, as Peter scratched his head with a corner of the *Times*—the conversation was taking place just outside the den—"none whatever. I'm sure none of the servants could have got there; besides, we *know* them all to be honest."

"Well, but surely, Peter, we equally *know* the young gentlemen to be honest," interrupted the Doctor, a little impatiently. He was terribly annoyed over this theft, and would have given anything to find out the criminal.

"That's where it is, Doctor;" Peter was in greater confusion of thought than ever. "Now if it had been a slice or two of ham, or a pat of butter, or some sugar,

or such like——” (just then Mr. Gurgoyne passed from masters’ to boys’ side on his way to class, and overheard Peter’s words with a sharp twinge of pain that he could not account for), “or jam, or any eatable that way,” went on Peter, “I might make a guess; but such a thing as Master Haxell’s ring shows it must have been a regular thief.”

“A regular thief most undoubtedly, Peter. It is horrible to think of, and we must use every effort to find him out. But about jam and those things—do you miss much?”

“Oh, no, Doctor, very little indeed. Some of the youngsters help themselves when they see a chance, but it’s more in joke than anything else, like young Horton’s case. But that was just before you came, Doctor.”

“It’s a joke I shan’t allow. What was it about Horton?”

Peter then told him a peccadillo or two of Horton’s in the sugar-lifting way, for which the lad had been well punished, though it was evident that he had no really thievish ideas. But the Doctor feared they might have grown since then; and with a warning to Peter to be on the watch, he passed into the grounds for his morning walk. Somehow or other Mr. Gurgoyne felt very uneasy about this matter; he could not help coupling in his mind what Isaac had inadvertently let drop regarding Johnny Horton’s former offences, and what he had overheard Red Weskit tell the Prin-

cipal about disappearances of butter and sugar. It struck him as a strange coincidence, to say the least, and in his next interview he extorted from Isaac a full account of these former misdemeanours, as well as—this with the greatest possible difficulty and hesitation—a scarcely whispered suspicion that Horton was now the criminal! It was really painful to Mr. Gurgyle to have to drag this suspicion out of the reluctant Isaac, but he considered it his duty to do all he could to clear up the matter; and, besides, he had less hesitation in listening to the boy's halting accusations of one he had fondly hoped would join their little prayer association when it came out that many of the other boys also looked on Horton with considerable suspicion. He really felt for Isaac Snell when the latter left his room with downcast head, his pocket-handkerchief to his face to hide his tears, and his general woe-begone appearance.

"Cheer up, Isaac, my boy," he said kindly, "you have only answered me as it was your duty to do; and the performance of duty, however unpleasant or repugnant, must always, in time, bring its own reward."

Mr. Gurgyle went straight to Dr. King, and without mentioning Isaac—for he had no desire to put the latter in the painful position of an informer—told him his suspicions. They chimed in exactly with opinions Dr. King had formed himself after learning fuller particulars of former cases than Red Weskit chose to give him. A strong and, by some means or other which

no one could explain, a pretty general idea of Horton's guilt seemed to pervade Lower boys and such of Uppers as had only recently left that portion of the school; and henceforth Johnny Horton, without being at all aware of it, was suspected and watched by a good many pairs of sharp eyes, including those of Red Weskit himself. For some time nothing whatever was missed; and it was quite a month after the theft of the ring when Red Weskit knocked at Mr. Gurgoyne's door—Dr. King was out—and, such was his impatience, opened it, and commenced a tale of the loss of some jam before he noticed that the little association were present and engaged with Mr. Gurgoyne in their devotional exercises. They were at once dismissed with wondering and sorrowing glances; and Peter told the Greek master how he had only that morning counted the pots in a cupboard near his den, and now two of them were missing! Telling Peter not to say a word to any one until Dr. King came in, when he was at once to inform him (Mr. Gurgoyne), he went in search of Horton, and brought him back to his chambers without saying what he wanted him for. On second thoughts he called Peter back for a witness, and then commenced to cross-examine the boy, who was in a terrible fright, and showed it in every possible way.

“And now,” he said to the trembling culprit, after he had recited to him all his former misdeeds, with the suspicions that attached to him as regarded the ring, “now this very day two pots of jam have been stolen

from Peter's cupboard, and I ask you solemnly, Did you take them?"

"I did not, sir!" was the strenuous denial, repeated two or three times, though there was no mistaking the agitation and confusion Johnny Horton laboured under.

"You positively deny it?"

"I do, sir; I had nothing to say to any jam; I didn't know there was any in that cupboard."

"Oh ho!" interrupted Peter, "then you knew the cupboard!" The boy was more confused than ever. The matter was very serious; and Mr. Gurgoyle, pained and sick at heart as he was, felt he must follow up this clue while it was hot, and put the question—

"Do you object—I am deeply grieved to ask such a horrid question, but I have no alternative—do you object to Peter searching your boxes?"

Johnny Horton hung his head, and turned a brilliant scarlet; then he fidgeted and turned one way and another; tears came into his eyes and rolled freely down his face; he sobbed heavily two or three times, and then he stammered out:—

"He can't, sir; I've lost my keys!"

Taking his manner and all into consideration, there could be no doubt that that statement was a lie; so Mr. Gurgoyle, displaying almost as much emotion as the wretched culprit himself, ordered Peter to take him by the wrist, and there and then the three went off to the dormitory to search Horton's clothes-box as it lay in the partition he occupied. Each of these

wooden divisions, in the immense room forming one of the dormitories, made a separate chamber, of very limited dimensions certainly, but large enough for the bed, chair, clothes-box, boot-rack, table, and other little conveniences appropriated to each boy. When they reached Horton's, the lad sat sullenly down on the bed-side, reiterating his former statement that he had lost—misaid—his keys. He failed, however, to mention that the loss was an intentional one.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Gurgoyle, severely, "since you persist, Peter must force your box open. I am quite determined to get to the bottom of this matter!"

"I've a right to see the Principal first," put in Horton, with the dogged, rude obstinacy born of despair.

"You have no such right, sir! Peter, try and open the box with your keys; and if you can't, then you must force it."

Red Weskit did not like the job at all; he thought it was rather a severe measure to take over a pot or two of jam; however, he commenced to pull the box out into the light, and in doing so knocked over the boot-rack, on which were a pair of short Wellingtons and a pair of rough Bluchers. The boots fell to the ground with a crash, and out of them rolled the two pots of jam, breaking with the fall, and messing the floor with the half-liquid preserves! Horton gave a loud cry and threw his hands up to his face. Red

Weskit looked at the boy with an expression of sincere sorrow ; while Mr. Gurgoyle, now that all was discovered, became rigid with disgust at the lies and crimes of the lost sheep that stood before him.

"It's not mine—it's not indeed, indeed, sir ! Peter, *you* know it's not me. Oh, what shall I do ? what *shall* I do ?" and the miserable criminal hid his face in his hands, and burst into an agony of tears.

"Take him down to Dr. King's room, Peter, and wait," was the stern order of the deeply-grieved Mr. Gurgoyle, who hated and dreaded vice of any kind, and was only severe when repressing or denouncing it. A quarter of an hour sufficed to satisfy the Principal of the unmistakable guilt of Horton, who only made his case worse by denying it altogether, and making the foolish old allegation that he was the victim of some one who put the jam in his boots out of spite ; and the next morning he received, in the presence of the whole school, the most severe flogging that had been administered for many a long day. No pity, no sorrow for him, was expressed by one single being who witnessed the punishment, for he turned every one against him by refusing to give any account whatever of Haxell's ring, persisting all through that he knew nothing whatever about it.

There was no *proof* that he had taken the ring, and therefore no actual charge could be made against him sufficient to authorise his expulsion from Kings Beeches ; but every one was quite convinced on

the point, and the Principal had resolved that he should not return after the next vacation.

But we were wrong in saying no one pitied him. One person did, and that was Red Weskit. He could not explain it to himself at all; the more he pondered over it, the more "muddled" (to use his own expression) he became; but somehow he was not quite satisfied that Horton really was the guilty party. He considered that Mr. Gurgoyle had taken the lad unawares, and urged on the case with undue haste against him; that the Principal had allowed his usual cool calm judgment to be overruled by the heat (in this affair) of the Greek professor; that unnecessary speed had marked the whole proceedings; and that Horton had not had one moment to think from the time he was accused until he was sentenced. The more Peter thought, the less he liked what had happened; until, quite against his will and his sober opinion, he began to think that the victim who had been flogged was *not* the boy who stole either the jam or the ring! He said no word of all this to any one whatsoever; he kept his counsel fast locked up in his own red weskit; but he instituted the closest and most careful watch that he had ever called upon himself to observe.

It was a bleak cold night, about half-past seven o'clock, and the equinoctial gales were howling in their fury round the old building, when Red Weskit started to his feet and listened intently. He was not in his

den, but in—a very strange place for him, and yet one to which, of late, he was very fond of retiring unnoticed at nightfall—an empty room in Grecians' Grove. What he heard was, he thought, a very light footstep in the passage. It advanced most cautiously, and seemed to stop at the door about three down from where Peter was. The latter waited until he had counted exactly one hundred and twenty seconds, and then he dashed out of the door, down the passage into the third room, and seized by the neck a boy who was kneeling over the occupant's open box ! The prisoner screamed out in terror, wriggled, kicked, and made stupendous efforts to get away ; but Peter was far too strong for him, dragged him—it was pitch dark—to where he knew the bell was, and rang violently. In a minute or two an under-servant came running up with a light, and Peter's prisoner was discovered to be none other than Master Isaac Snell !

“So you're the thief, are you, with your preaching and your praying, you vile young hypocritical monster !” Peter fairly foamed with rage when he found who the prisoner was.

“Loosen his neck, Mr. Westcott, or you'll strangle him,” said the other man ; and Peter did so, and commenced to examine the depraved wretch. They found he had opened the box with a false key ; on the floor was a gold pin he had taken from it, and in his trousers pocket a purse that Peter instantly recognised as belonging to Thompson, the occupier of the

room. Peter had watched Snell and the others go to Mr. Gurgoyle's room for their weekly meeting, and had then—as, indeed, he had for the last two months—made his way to Grecians' Grove to watch, leaving an under-servant in the den with the information that he had gone to supper.

“That's proof positive, I think, James?”

“I should think so, indeed, Mr. Westcott; but hadn't we better make a job of it and search for Mr. Haxell's ring?”

They did so—Snell had never said a word, but stood trembling and as white as death—and found carefully sewn in the waistband of the villain's trousers not only the ring, but sundry pencil-cases, pins, and other articles of value that had been missed in the course of the year,

“Now,” said Peter, sternly, when they had taken all, “now you shall be paid for your cleverness!” and he walked him down to the great play-room, set him on a table amidst the wondering boys, and told the whole tale. He then suddenly slipped away and left him to his fate.

For obvious reasons we cannot detail the fearful castigation administered to Snell that night—suffice it to say, that he had to run up and down the double ranks of the whole school *six times*—but when he was carried up to bed he had received such a “public thrashing” as no one had ever known to be inflicted at Kings Beeches before. The next morning he had disappeared

from the dormitory, but whether he had been removed by orders of the Principal so as to avoid a public *exposé*, or whether he had crawled away of his own accord, was never clearly known to most of the boys.

Then poor Johnny Horton's innocence came out. When accused by Mr. Gurgoyle (of course it was Snell who had run to put the jam in his partition when Peter Westcott had burst in with the news of the theft), he had become confused on account of the great danger he was in—for he had casually heard that day from another boy that he was suspected of taking Haxell's ring; and he had refused to give his keys up, because there were some fireworks in his box, and he feared if they were found matters would be only worse for him, as they were more strictly forbidden than anything else. He knew his former sugar and butter offences were known; he really had no time to think; he was sentenced before he could see that it would be best for him to confess to the fireworks; and his unfortunate head was in such a state that he could not, even when they commenced to flog him, distinguish the best course from the worst. Snell had acted with devilish cunning all through; he knew that *some one* must be suspected for the constant thefts, and he fixed it on Johnny Horton, both because of former offences rendering it more likely to be him than any one else, and also because he had an old spite against him. The finished young villain had made a perfect tool—fool would be the better word perhaps—of Mr. Gurgoyle; through

him, of the Principal, who ever afterwards bitterly regretted his conduct in the matter ; and had even for a brief time thrown dust in the usually clear eyes of Red Weskit, who reproached himself for years afterwards with the rapidity with which he had bounded to a false conclusion. Mr. Gurgoyne felt so thoroughly ashamed of himself for his silly—nay childish—conduct in the whole affair, that he gave up his professorship and left the College within a month—first making Johnny Horton (who had received a warning against petty thefts that he never forgot) the most ample amends that lay in his power.

For years nothing had been heard at Kings Beeches of Isaac Snell, until one evening, in a small country town, Johnny Horton, who happened to be travelling in the pursuit of his business as a successful corn merchant, entered the Exchange to hear a lecture on Temperance, and found in the “melancholy example”—or reformed (?) drunkard who narrated his experiences, his quondam schoolfellow and accuser, Isaac Snell ! He put himself in communication with the chief lecturer, and managed, without much difficulty, to get the main particulars of Snell’s career. His father, disgusted with the lad’s natural bent to all evil, but more especially to thieving and hypocrisy, had made some few efforts to reform him, but had to give up in despair. He got him one or two places in offices, but every one the youth had been compelled to leave under grave suspicion of dishonesty.

Then he became an actor, but he could not be trusted, and soon no manager would employ him. After that he took to toutting for a low and swindling insurance company, but even there he robbed the robbers, and was turned off after serving a term of imprisonment. Subsequently he set up as a Temperance lecturer; but as it happened to be found out that he drank to excess in private, and appeared even sometimes in public in a state unbecoming any man, but more especially a teetotal apostle, he speedily lost that employment, and gradually sank and sank until he was found by Johnny Horton in the degrading position mentioned above. Since that some of the Old Beeches have occasionally come across him, but never to hear any good of him; and, after frequent and severe terms of imprisonment he had turned into a thimble-rigging sharp, and may be found, when out of gaol, amongst the swarms of blacklegs who infest our English race-courses—a fitting end to the career that commenced with petty thieving under the religious mask that marks the complete hypocrite.





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A FISH OUT OF WATER.

CHAPTER I.

THEY ENJOY AGAIN.

WHEN there: I hope you are convinced now, **BOYDELL** and the Squire took up, from where it lay on the floor of his study, a long slender pole with a copper-wire noose neatly affixed to its finely-pointed end.

BOYDELL, the head gamekeeper on the **BOYDELL** Manor, which lay adjacent to that of **KINGS BEECHES**, scratched his head continually as he turned over and over and closely examined in every part as undoubted a fish-scare as ever was used by poacher.

"A fish-scare sure enough, Squire! there's no manner of question about that; and right well put together too; but still I say there's no——"

"Confound you, sir!" shouted the ebullient old gentleman, who was not at all in the habit of having his opinions questioned, "do you mean still to tell me there's no poaching going on, when I found that very machine myself in the grass near the biggest of the pike-holes? Do you take me for a fool, sir? Answer me that; and let me tell you that ponds, and streams, and all, are being emptied of their fish; and yet you have the impudence to tell me they're not poached!"

"Well, Squire, but we watch so close."

"Then watch closer!" thundered the irascible old man, who looked upon his trout, and jack, and perch—on all his fish indeed—as so many children.

Of late he had had reason to believe the poachers had got at them in earnest; Bolton had been in consequence urged to the greatest pitch of watchfulness; and Mr. Boydell himself had gone beating about with the result of finding the snare now in the keeper's hands.

"Yes, sir," went on the gamekeeper, "we have watched closer, and did we not have five of those Pitchcot loafers convicted at the last assizes?"

"My good man, that's all very well, and I rewarded you for it; but there's proof positive that it is going on as bad as ever. I am determined to stop it, and if you can't manage to bring it to an end, why, I must get some one who can."

Bolton saw there was no use arguing the matter any further; indeed, in the presence of the snare, it was



Story the Seventh.

A FISH OUT OF WATER.

CHAPTER I.

OLD TRICKS AGAIN.

WELL, there! I hope you are convinced now, Bolton," and the Squire took up, from where it lay on the floor of his study, a long slender pole with a copper-wire noose neatly affixed to its finely-pointed end.

Bolton, the head gamekeeper on the Boydell Manor, which lay adjacent to that of Kings Beeches, scratched his head confusedly as he turned over and over and closely examined in every part as undoubted a fish-snare as ever was used by poacher.

"A fish-snare sure enough, Squire! in manner of question about that; and together too; but still I say th—"

"Confound you, sir!" shouted the choleric old gentleman, who was not at all in the habit of having his opinions questioned, "do you mean still to tell me there's no poaching going on, when I found that very machine myself in the grass near the biggest of the pike-holes? Do you take me for a fool, sir? Answer me that; and let me tell you that ponds, and streams, and all, are being emptied of their fish; and yet you have the impudence to tell me they're not poached!"

"Well, Squire, but we watch so close."

"Then watch closer!" thundered the irascible old man, who looked upon his trout, and jack, and perch—on all his fish indeed—as so many children.

Of late he had had reason to believe the poachers had got at them in earnest; Bolton had been in consequence urged to the greatest pitch of watchfulness; and Mr. Boydell himself had gone beating about with the result of finding the snare now in the keeper's hands.

"Yes, sir," went on the gamekeeper, "we have watched closer, and did we not have five of those Pitchcot loafers convicted at the last assizes?"

"My good man, that's all very well, and I rewarded you for it; but the fact is, I am positive that it is going on as before, and I have determined to stop it, and if you can't find an end, why, I must

bring the matter any
of the snare, it was

plain that the Squire was right, so with rather a down-cast countenance he left "the presence," taking the way down to the trout-stream to ponder over what had passed, and seek inspiration (in the matter of detecting the offenders) from the little river itself. The ponds he did not visit, as he had gone straight from them to Mr. Boydell's *sanctum*; besides, the principal offences were committed on the Pitch, and its banks were more likely to suggest useful action than any other place. He had not been many years in Squire Boydell's service, but since he had, the game on the manor had increased rapidly; Bolton, however, found himself quite unable to keep the fish up to the usual standard, and hence he was not thought so much of by the Squire as he really deserved to be. He sat on the bank of the sparkling little river, that wound round nearly two-thirds of the manor, and was in places quite close to the Kings Beeches property, and examined the question from every point of view. Since the conviction of the five men, Bolton felt sure that but little of the poaching was done from Pitchcot; therefore it must lie between vagrants from other villages, gipsies, or perhaps men who came from the town of Buncombe on purpose. Yet he could not understand how it was that he never dropped across any of them. He and his "mate" were quite worn out with watching by day, and night too, and yet they never even hit on any of the usual traces of poachers.

"They're rare good workmen whoever they be, if

they be at all, and I suppose, from that snare, they do come here; and only wait till Bill Bolton gets hold of one on 'em, and see if he don't give it him hot!"

But the more he thought, the more puzzled he became; so he went home to take his wife's opinion, and to blow up his assistant as he had been himself blown up by the Squire.

"I tell you what it is, Charley," said Sandy Farquhar, as they lay under some trees in a remote corner of the play-ground, "this little game won't do much longer; we're safe to be found out, and then there'll be a pretty kettle of fish!"

"Why, what a funky chap you are," answered the other, his restless eyes and eager face turning here, there, and everywhere, with the "hunting instinct" natural to the boy—an instinct that was apparently beyond control, and was always leading its owner into scrapes; "there's no danger, except just enough to make us careful, and——"

"It wasn't very careful of you to lose that snare the other day."

"But I didn't lose it; I hid it closely away in the rushes; it must have been some confounded sneaking fellow that picked it up for himself. I don't believe thick-headed Bolton would ever find it—or his man either."

"Well, it's gone, and they may trace it to us."

"Fudge! you don't suppose I'm such a fool as to

make a snare with any marks on it? Besides, that's all over now; and we must have another go in on Saturday."

"Not for me, thank you," said Sandy, who did not, however, look very resolute over it.

"Yes, for you;" and Belmour's North American Indian face gleamed again with consciousness of superiority over his more weak-minded comrade, "for you and me both. I'm tired of doing nothing, and I'll plan it all so that we can have a jolly afternoon's sport and a glorious supper at Mother Snell's afterwards."

Sandy argued his best for some short time; but he had allowed himself to fall completely under the control of Belmour, so that his opposition now was one of fear more than of reason, and consequently was pretty easily overruled. Ever since what Belmour called the "blow up" about Arty Normadale's affair, now more than eighteen months ago, he had been doubly careful; indeed, he had given up (for what seemed to him to be an interminable time) all his poaching tricks, so that Squire Boydell's game eggs remained unstolen, his hares and rabbits unsnared, his fish uncaught, and his pheasants undisturbed, to the material benefit of them all. But Charley Belmour was an arrant poacher at heart. He was the fourth son of a gentleman of good property, who was a most strict preserver of game of all sorts—one of those men who regard the illegal slaughter of a hare as a crime equal almost to murder, the theft of pheasants' eggs as burglary,

and the wiring of a jack as quite on a par with larceny.

Unfortunately, instead of giving Charley's inclinations—his elder brothers did not care a pin's head for sporting of any sort—legitimate scope, he forbade the boy to indulge in them at all, with the result that the latter fell into the hands of an assistant gamekeeper, who had been an old poacher, and who put Charley up to every art and "dodge" for surreptitiously obtaining the coveted sport. He was an apt pupil during vacation times, but Boydell Manor was "the happy hunting-grounds" on which he put the lessons he had received at home into practice.

When Arty Normadale had been "removed," Belmour was shifted into another room in "Grecians' Grove," where Sandy Farquhar was subsequently sent to join him. The latter was also very fond of sport; but it was in a legitimate way, on his father's estates and with his consent, and he had never poached in his life till Belmour led him into it. Farquhar was that plastic sort of character that is easily led by any one of persuasive powers; so, though knowing and feeling that he was doing very wrong—acting criminally, in fact—he allowed his better thoughts to be subverted, entering on a career of daring and danger against his own sense and his better feelings. Peter Westcott had kept a very close eye on Charley Belmour since Farmer Hanwell's rick-yard had been burnt down; he knew very well he had been concerned in that business; and

he never let an opportunity pass without trying in a friendly way to impress on him the career of wickedness he would easily glide into unless he restrained his inclinations. Red Weskit did not, however, know that Belmour had poached the fish for that ever-memorable supper; nor did he know in what particular line his almost unconquerable tastes lay; but he had a very shrewd *suspicion* that Belmour was up to some underhand business, and could not help associating him with some complaints that had been made as to trespass, broken-down fences, a copper-wire hare-snare or so, and sundry other misdemeanours of a like nature. Of course, Belmour was made cautious from these warnings of Red Weskit, and for quite fourteen months abstained from his favourite "amusement," save occasionally in a way that could not be found out; but of late he became satisfied that all suspicion was lulled, and, with the aid of Sandy, whom in the meantime he had won over to his own bad habits, was at his old bad games with a vigour and zest redoubled on account of his long abstinence.

Saturday half-holiday came round in due course, and the two young poachers went off "for a long walk in the country." They were both armed with stout bamboo canes—a present from an Indian uncle in London, Belmour said, with a disregard for the truth that was the natural result of his criminal proclivities—and started off in the direction of Buncombe at a rattling pace. When about two miles from Kings

Beeches, they turned to their left, down a long grass lane that led to a distant farm when it was used (which was very seldom); and when more than two-thirds of its length had been traversed, they turned again to their left, rounding the College property, and gaining Boydell Manor, which lay on the far side of Kings Beeches as you approached from Buncombe. In his doublings, his aptitude for taking advantage of every drain, hedge, rising ground, or cover of any sort, Charley Belmour displayed the cunning of the gipsy with the skill of the deer-stalker; and when at length they arrived at the crest of a rising ground, below which sparkled and swirled the Pitch on its winding way through the manor and towards Pitchcot, they found themselves in a lonely and secluded spot without having been noticed by a single human being. They were far away from any road, lane, or even bridle-track, while a better place for their operations in every respect could hardly be found. The bamboo sticks—"my uncle" in London happened to be a well-known fishing-tackle maker—were rapidly unscrewed, put together again, and took the shape of sturdy-topped bait-rods. Charley produced a tin case with carefully prepared bait, Sandy Farquhar waded across the stream, the lines were joined with several pendant "droppers" stretching all across the water, and the two commenced the most deadly of all sorts of angling—cross-fishing. It was a splendid afternoon for their sport; the sky was the dull grey so dear to the heart of the angler, the water

was in excellent "order," and a gentle breeze from the south-west caused just ripple enough to conceal the boys and their lines from fish of an inquiring turn of mind. Before very long they had an india-rubber pouch, which Sandy had strapped under the back of his coat for concealment, tolerably filled with trout and a small jack or two, so that when it was time to leave off even the voracious Belmour admitted that his appetite for sport was pretty well satisfied.

"Now for Mother Snell's," said he, as they unscrewed the rods, turning them once more into innocent-looking walking-sticks.

"Well, but Charley, I can't carry all the fish, it bulges so; and suppose we are met?"

"Oh, there's no one to meet us; however, best be safe," and he took some of the glittering beauties and disposed of them in his pockets till Sandy's bag looked nearly its natural size again. Then Charley set off—still always under cover of a hedge or something of the sort—in a direction he knew would bring them out in the lane where Widow Snell and her idiot son lived in great poverty, reaching that haven for rest and surreptitious meals in perfect safety. After a glorious supper of fried fish, baked potatoes, brown bread and butter, washed down with good home-brewed ale—all of which, with the exception of the fish, Mother Snell was in the habit of finding for errant-boys from the College for "a consideration"—they took the road home.

"Well, my lads!" was the cheery call of old Squire Boydell, who was riding his stout shooting-pony when he met them at a turn of the road, "been for a walk, eh?"

"Yes, sir," answered Charley as bold as brass, while Sandy could not find courage to look up even at the man he had just been *robbing*; "we came round by the Brownley Lane from the Buncombe high road."

"Didn't see any hang-dog rascals down the stream as you crossed the bridge, eh?"

"No, sir," answered Belmour, with perfect truth (they had been a good three miles from the bridge), "we did not meet any one."

"No one like a poacher? The rascals are thinning my fish finely. I found one of their snares the other day."

Sandy Farquhar blushed a vivid red, but concealed it by stooping to tie his shoe; the other said innocently:

"A snare, sir; what's that?"

"Why, a pole with a copper-wire noose at the end. Have you never seen one?"

"Never, sir!" lied Charley Belmour, and after a few more kindly words from the Squire they resumed their way, and arrived in bounds in good time.

CHAPTER II.

A NIGHT EXCURSION.

It must not be supposed that Belmour was a very courageous lad. The contrary was the fact. He was very daring in sporting matters ; but it was the daring of the gipsy or the thief, not that of a really brave person. Cunning, trickery, and a perfect knowledge of what may be called the hunting arts of concealment and instinctive evasion of danger, gave him comparative immunity. But it would be far more true to describe him, in his relations with his schoolfellows, as a bully than a fellow of pluck. He was fond of teasing the little chaps in hopes of getting what he called " fun " out of them, and for his performances in that way he suffered many a good licking from elder brothers and cousins. Nor was his energy, save in the one direction of poaching, of any good account. As regarded games and the usual school amusements, he was actually lazy, while it was as much trouble to get him to join in a cricket or football match as it would have been to persuade another to construe a page of " Livy " or " Virgil " out of class time. He was positively stupid, too, in all matters that savoured not of his favourite sporting ; but in that he was, beyond doubt, *facile princeps*. Sandy Farquhar, on the

other hand, was really brave ; had been honest until he was seduced away by the other ; and, possessing a far superior brain and intellect, it was a thousand pities his weakness had allowed him to be led away by quite an inferior type of character. For led away he certainly was, giving in in everything of moment to his utterly unscrupulous bed-room companion.

Warned by the information Squire Boydell had unwittingly given, that he himself had found the fish-snare, and instinctively aware from the old gentleman's manner that he was having his stream and fish-ponds carefully watched, Belmour resolved that for the present at least the day business should be given up, and that any future excursions should be made under cover of night. Sandy Farquhar did not in the least object to the change in their plans ; the romance and (as he thought it, though Charley was of a different opinion) increased danger gave a more adventurous character to the fishing ; and he entered into the preparations with a zeal that positively delighted the other.

The room in "Grecians' Grove" that the two occupied looked out on a row of class-rooms that projected on the ground-floor from the main building, the roof being in consequence just under the windows of the Grove and not any very great depth below them. Therefore, by letting oneself down from any of those windows, the comparative safety of the roof would be reached, and thence to the ground was only some twenty feet—no distance at all for two such active

climbers as Belmour and Sandy, both of whom were as agile as monkeys. On the night selected for their first attempt they did not go to bed at all, but sat, with the light out, whispering over their plans, feeling that everything was in order, until they thought that all the other "Grecians" must be asleep, the masters all safe, and that Red Weskit had been duly round the inside building, as was his nightly custom since Arty Normadale's business.

"Now then, Sandy, let us make a start," and Charley Belmour got up cautiously as the clock struck ten.

"You're sure the ropes are long enough?"

"Quite sure. Have you locked the door?"

"Safe as a church!" was Sandy's answer, as he turned the key twice in the lock.

"Now then!" Charley opened the sash, which had been well greased in preparation for this night's work, firmly secured a knotted rope round the heavy bedstead, and again in the bars of the grate, and lowered the end on to the class-room roof below.

"You go first, Sandy, and I'll let the things down to you."

"All right!" Sandy cautiously crept on the window-sill, peered into the darkness below wistfully, listened eagerly for a second or so, and then commenced gradually to descend. As soon as he was safe on the sloping roof below, Belmour lowered the bamboo canes and a new fish-snare he had manufactured on the

pattern of the old one, by a cord, as also the india-rubber pouch, with one or two minor articles, and then proceeded to get down himself. Next, with another rope they managed the descent of the sloping roof, and then, in a corner, they fixed a climbing-iron, then another, and in a few seconds were safe on *terra firma*. Remaining perfectly silent for a few moments to make sure that all was right, they rapidly overhauled for a second time their tackle, and then started, keeping cautiously under the shadows of the building, along by the garden wall, and so up towards the farm enclosure. They had nearly cleared it when Sandy tripped in a branch across their path and fell heavily to the ground, making a slight exclamation as he did so. A furious bark burst from a bull-dog inside, and Charley Belmour's heart sank with fright.

"For goodness' sake don't make such a row!" he whispered under his breath. Yet the dog seemed to hear him, and bayed more furiously than ever, while he tore at his chain in a passion at his confinement.

"Let us cut for it—the yard-men will be sure to be roused by that confounded brute!" And Belmour set the example by rapidly and silently running—still under the shelter of the enclosure—until he came to a hedge, turning down which he continued his swift course until he had put quite a quarter of a mile between himself and the anticipated danger. Sandy followed, but at nothing like the pace his comrade

went at—Belmour could run like an Indian—and joined him at last, panting to excess.

“Best go back, I think.”

“Certainly not,” answered Sandy; “if the men are aroused they will hunt about the neighbourhood of the yard, and we should be found; they will never think of going down to the school buildings—so we had best stay here or go on.”

“Let us go on; it’s not safe even here.” And they resumed their journey towards the stream. But Belmour’s fright had made him very cautious, so that he scarcely ventured into the open at all, but dodged round every field and close until he found himself safe on the banks of the Pitch, when the rods were put together and work commenced in earnest.

Somehow or other they were not successful; whether it was that the night was too dark, or that Belmour’s hand had lost some of its cunning owing to the start he had got, or that the fish were not in a feeding humour, they did not have more than one or two rises, and did not succeed in hooking a single victim. Still they persevered for a long time, but always with the same bad fortune.

“It’s a beastly unlucky night,” said Belmour at last, throwing down the rod in disgust and taking the snare in his right hand. Then he lay down flat on his stomach and peered intently into the water, ready to raise the snare like lightning should any trout or jack pass into the wire slip-knot. He had two or three

chances, but each time missed, and at last gave it up in despair and sat on the bank—a firm believer in the sportsman's "luck," or ill-luck as the case might be. But Sandy Farquhar, whose spirits were now high and jubilant, and who really delighted in this night adventure, took both rod and snare and advanced along the stream, fishing the shallow places with the one and the deep holes with the other. However, he too was unsuccessful, but plodded on until he was about a quarter of a mile or so from Belmour, when a happy thought struck him. A large bundle of cut-and-dried coarse grass lay by the spot he had just arrived at, and a salmon-spearing trick of the Highlands at once occurred to him. He bound up three or four wisps of the stuff, lit one with a match, put it carefully on the stream, and stood over it with the snare as it slowly floated down. Several fish at once came up to look at it, and in a second he landed one, then another, then a third, and was just noosing another when he was seized by the collar from behind and dashed to the ground.

"You born idiot!" hissed out Belmour, while his eyes flashed again with passion, "do you want to ruin us altogether? That ——— blaze," in his wild rage he swore at the other, "must be seen by the watchers, if there are any about!"

In immediate confirmation of his words a long loud whistle was heard from the rising ground behind them; they instinctively looked in the direction, and in spite

of the great darkness, could see the loom of three men's figures against the sky-line.

The keen "hunting instinct" at once came back to Charley Belmour, for it applies almost as much to pursued as to pursuer, and he was himself again.

"Do as I do exactly," he said, and picking up the second rod and the snare, while Sandy slipped the fish in his pocket, he, without a second's pause, stepped into the stream, followed by Farquhar, and waded across with a great splash and noise !

CHAPTER III.

A HOPELESS CASE.

BOLTON, shouting hoarsely with joy at the chance he now had at "them d—d poaching rascals," dashed across the few hundred yards of broken ground that separated him from the spot where he heard the splashing, followed by his assistant and another hired watcher. There was an awkward fence to be crossed before they reached the bank, and Bolton, determined not to lose the chance luck had thrown in his way, went at it with all the fire and fury of a young steeplechase horse. The result was that he miscalculated his distance and fell on his head on the other side; while his assistants, more cool, scrambled over and helped the bruised and confused head-keeper on his legs again.

"All right, master; here's the faggot the scoundrels lit!" cried one of them, "and here's where they must have crossed."

"So it is, Bill; we'll cross and nail the beggars—they knowed it was evener running the other side," said Bolton, only half recovered from the shock of his fall. They dashed over the stream, turned to their right—on the left was a stiff thorn hedge, which they knew the poachers would not attempt—and while Bolton ran rapidly along the very edge of the Pitch, the other two

spread themselves, within sight, across the bank field, and thus, all three abreast, they tore up-stream at their best speed.

"That's all right," said Charley Belmour, peeping up from under a bush on the *other* or original side of the stream, "and if there are no more of them about, we may walk home at our ease."

"'Jove, a narrow squeak!" answered Sandy Farquhar, rising from an adjacent bit of cover. "You did that cleverly, Charley."

"Trust me to dodge these fellows," returned the other, with some conscious pride in his tone, "but now we must be off up the very track they came down," and he set off at a good round pace in that direction. In fact, he had only adopted an old but very good trick, that Bolton would hardly have been deceived by had not his heavy fall somewhat confused his brain. After crossing the stream with a splash, as if of surprised terror, Charley and Sandy had stooped and crawled rapidly along for a little distance, when they entered the stream again without a sound, crouched as they recrossed, and remained snug under the overhanging bushes on the other side, within a few yards of where the gamekeeper and his mates dashed over the water.

"We left them our second snare as a legacy," laughed out Belmour, as he halted to allow Sandy to take a little breath—an article he himself never seemed to require. "Law, how mad old Boydell will be when they bring it to him!"

"But what shall we do with the fish?"

"Confound it! you don't mean to say you have brought them away?"

"That I have—look!" and he held the shining beauties up.

"Well, it won't matter much; we're not on the road home, and they may as well take their chance here." He took them from Sandy, and threw them carelessly in the field they were passing through.

"Now then to destroy the trail. Take off your shoes and socks, Sandy, and we'll go along this wet ditch till we come to the hard path leading down towards the Beech Walk plantation; we shan't be traced that way."

It was a long and wearisome process to go through, but it was at least safe, and when Sandy and his companion had scaled the class-room roof, and were once more safe in "Grecians' Grove," they were able to go to bed tolerably well assured of their entire safety.

"And you didn't catch any of the ruffians, sir?" asked the Squire in a blue rage the following morning, when Bolton had made his report.

"No, sir, we couldn't, they were too quick for us," muttered the man, with downcast head. He was thoroughly disgusted with himself, and disheartened at the results of the night's chase. He had the second snare, half under his arm, half-concealed by his coat, and he now produced it, while Mr. Boydell stamped

about the room, swearing at Bolton's stupidity, at his own ill-fortune, and at the unparalleled impudence of the poachers in using a second snare so soon after the capture of the first one.

"Why, I declare it's the very same—strand for strand, and knot for knot—the same fellow made the two of 'em! Look ye here, Bolton, here's a good clue for you, a very good one; you must trace it up, and—I am sorry to say so—but if you don't, you are no use to Boydell Manor, and we must part." The Squire was enraged beyond measure by this last audacious attempt to "burn the river," as Bolton called it, and he had quite made up his mind to part with his keeper unless he brought some of the culprits to justice. He then ordered his shooting-pony, and directing Bolton to attend him and point out the exact locality, set off to the stream to judge of it all for himself.

"Humph! so they crossed there, did they? and you boobies ran straight on the line without ever making a cast! Pretty keepers, and no mistake! Why, of course, they crossed back again, once your backs were turned." Squire Boydell ferreted about till he found their footmarks and the prints of their feet in the soft clay. He then tracked them up to the spot where the fish had been cast away. "Three of my finest trout! By Jove, sir, this is too bad. Just look here now—I'll have no more of this, Mr. Bolton; you can go to the steward this afternoon and draw three months' wages, and don't let me see your face again!"

The poor man turned away without a word; he could not keep his place, even if it was offered to him, after what the Squire had so often said to him, and he went away to his cottage and his family, a man utterly ruined, for who would employ him again after such a dismissal? The Squire traced the boys to the wet ditch, or drain rather, that ran for two or three miles through his property, but there he lost all trace, and after some hours gave up all further search as useless.

Gradually it leaked out that Bolton had been dismissed, and country gossip at last brought the news (in a garbled form) even down to Red Weskit's den, but the old man, for reasons of his own, kept the news to himself, and it went no further. Charley Belmour, however, heard it, as he somehow managed to hear nearly every bit of country news that was afloat, and, it must be confessed, it gave him a sore pang or two. But he was not at all a really humane fellow; selfishness was too much his master for that; he pitied the man, but the thought of confessing his share in the business never once entered his head; and carefully keeping his knowledge from Sandy Farquhar, who would at once have gone and told Squire Boydell all, he simply gave up his excursions for a time on the score of danger, waiting till the matter had blown over before he could again resume them.

Bolton left the gamekeeper's lodge and took up his residence in Pitchcot, where he felt, with the two snares in his possession, the clue was to be taken up if

anywhere. One day he met Red Weskit, who easily drew the whole story from him.

"Boys'!—you are sure the footmarks on the river-bank were boys'?"

"Certain, Peter, and well-shod boys, too. If I didn't know your young gentlemen *were* young gentlemen, I'd a'most swear it was some of their well-made boots!"

"Oh, couldn't be—couldn't be," answered the other, as he went on his way.

"I say, Master Belmour, have you lost a shoe-lace at the river-side?" Peter asked Belmour suddenly that very evening. The latter looked the picture of dismay, coloured as violently as his complexion would allow, looked down at his feet, and then stammered out:

"N—no, Peter; not that I know of."

Red Weskit's sharp eye was fixed on him now with certainty.

"Well, Bolton—you know he's lost his place—found one where the poachers were, you know; were not you one of them?"

But Belmour had recovered himself now that the first shock was over, and stoutly denied the accusation; and as Peter had no real evidence against him, he was obliged to let the matter drop, warning the lad, however, that it would be far better for him to make a clean breast of it at once, and thus, perhaps, have

Bolton reinstated. Belmour point-blank denied all knowledge of the affair, and there the thing dropped.

Two months afterwards, about eight P.M. one dark evening, a knock was heard at Mother Tandy's door in Pitchcot, and Charley Belmour walked in. There was no one there but the old hag herself. She obtained her living in a very dubious manner, and honest folk were shy of her company ; so that the boy had no hesitation in asking at once for what he wanted—some copper wire and some fish-hooks. Mrs. Tandy handed some down, and he was making his selection, when the door was opened rudely, and in walked Bolton and Red Weskit !

"Oh ho ! Master Belmour, this is what you call going for a country walk, is it ?" asked the latter ; while Bolton burst in with a loud oath that he would have both the boy and the woman locked up for poaching.

"Me poach, Mr. Bolton !" cried Mrs. Tandy, sniffing, and throwing up her hands.

"I've clean proof against you now, you young imp of Satan !" he shouted at Belmour, who was as pale as death, and trembling all over.

"Go down on your knees, and confess all at once to the man you have ruined !" ordered Red Weskit, who could be very stern on occasion.

Belmour actually did as he was told, and there and then poured out the whole tale of all his poaching from beginning to end. The two men then walked him

down to Kings Beeches, where a formal inquiry was instituted into his conduct, eventuating in the course of a few days in his being expelled the College.

Mr. Farquhar was also asked to take his son—whose conduct was much less guilty than was that of the other—away at the end of a couple of months, so that the degradation of expulsion was spared him; and Bolton was, at the special request of the Principal, once more restored to his situation at Boydell Manor.

Farquhar is now a prosperous gentleman-farmer in Scotland, a keen shot, a capital sportsman, but one who is never over-anxious to be severe on a poacher; well remembering, as he does, that he was once one of the fraternity himself, and had a very near chance of being caught *flagrante delicto*, and severely punished.

Charles Belmour passed his examination, with considerable difficulty, for the army—which employment his father, who was enraged that any son of his should turn out a poacher, thought most suitable for him; but he was refused a certificate of “good character” from Kings Beeches, and consequently never obtained a commission. He then, to avoid the reproaches of his family, took to wandering on the Continent, picking up money at billiards, and gambling a good deal. Occasionally he comes to England on a money-raising expedition, for he has squandered all his own; where, though he is not positively denied, he is unwillingly admitted into society, and the houses of former acquaintances of his family. But he is a mean, low

fellow to have anything to say to ; and men vote him a regular sponge, and despise him accordingly ; while no lady (such is his bad name) will be seen in his company alone. He sneaks through life, looked down upon and heartily disliked by all, and he has no "sport" whatever. He took all his *illegally* when he was a boy ; now that he is a man none falls to his lot.





Story the Eighth.

A FRENCH IMPORTATION.

CHAPTER I.

JOHNNY CRAPAUD.

HILLO! new fellow! new chap! new chum!" and similar shouts were raised one afternoon in the late winter, or very early spring rather, as the boys came trooping out into the playground after dinner, and discovered the presence of a fresh lad who had just joined the school. He was standing by a corner of the Ball Alley, leaning affectedly on a tasselled cane, surveying the fellows as they swarmed round him with great composure, and even superciliousness.

"How much for the chimney-pot hat?" "My, ain't he a swell?" "How fine we are! Just look at our chain, and pin, and rings—oh, just look at our

rings!" A hundred critical remarks were made on the somewhat fantastic and ultra-fashionable cut of the new-comer's attire, plentifully bedizened with jewellery as it was, and so different in every respect from the simple every-day habiliments of a Kings Beeches school-boy. He did not deign to answer any of the chaffing—not to say highly personal—questions that were put to him, but leaned back against the wall, apparently highly amused with his would-be tormentors.

"Well, tell us your name, any way?" asked one fellow, of a curious disposition.

"Aubrey Dynton, at your service, monsieur!" this new man-boy answered in French, with an elaborate bow and a wave of his tall hat—an article unknown at Kings Beeches, except for Uppers in holiday time.

"Johnny Crapaud, by Jove!" said the inquisitor, with a strong sneer on the insulting nickname.

"A Frenchy! Law, fancy a real live Frenchman coming to the Beeches with his airs and graces!" said another; while numerous similar remarks of a sneering and unkind nature—for many boys are and will be cruel to a new-comer at first, though after a time they may become his fast friends—greeted the new student, who could evidently understand English, though he did not speak it. Under them, at length, he began to show signs of annoyance and temper; he raised his cane, as if to strike a lad who took hold of

his watch-chain, with the disparaging remark, "Brass!" and he commenced to shift his feet uneasily, as though the ill-natured reception he was receiving was rather too hot to be pleasant.

"Oh, I say, you fellows! you're coming it too strong now," interfered honest, good-hearted Roger Marsworth, one of the most junior of the Uppers, elbowing his way to the side of the new boy; "this isn't fair play. One at a time. And he can't answer you, poor chap!"

"Roger wants to get the half-day out with him!" squeaked some bitter little fellow, alluding to the Kings Beeches kindly custom of sending one of the students out walking with a new-comer for the first day or two of his arrival, to put him up to the manners and customs of the place.

There was a kindly look in Marsworth's brown eyes as he took Dynton's hand, addressed him in his own language, and led him away out of the throng of gaping youngsters who pressed around the "Frenchy," as they had already nicknamed him. Marsworth was one of the few boys at the Beeches who at that time—it was during the Crimean war—could speak French fluently, and he was accordingly selected by the Principal to take Dynton about and initiate him into their ways. They went off for a long ramble in the pleasant woods and grounds surrounding the College; and in the course of it Aubrey Dynton without hesitation communicated to the other all the particulars of his

previous life. His father was a man of considerable property in England, besides being next heir to a great deal more; he hated his own country for some occult reason, living almost entirely abroad, where in process of time he almost forgot his native language, so little did he ever use it; his mother was of very similar tastes and habits, so that in fact it was rather a wonder than otherwise that their son knew any English at all. From Aubrey's conversation, Marsworth readily guessed that the parents were very loose in their ideas of religion and domestic virtues, and he was shocked to find that his new companion, young as he was, was bitten with a shadow of the cynicism of the Boulevards, and an affectation of the philosophy of the worst French schools of the day. In fact Aubrey Dynton was a complete boy-man of the world, being, at the age of fourteen, a doubter in sacred things, a professor of the loosest possible code of honour and morals that his mind could understand, and totally wanting in those manly qualifications which an English boy of the same age, if properly trained, aspires to, and has already attained in a degree. Energy, earnestness, "back-bone" to his character he seemed to have none; regard for good behaviour and truth was absolutely wanting; he was only a Parisian *flâneur* in miniature, and, unfortunately, a *flâneur* of the worst type.

"And now, let us have a little smoke?" asked Dynton, producing tobacco and tiny cigarette papers, all in a neat silver case.

Marsworth informed him that smoking was most positively forbidden by the rules.

"Pouf for the rules, mon ami! what do I care for their laws?" and he rolled himself up a cigarette, which he enjoyed with evident delight after it had been refused by his companion.

"Let us enter this place—eh—for one little glass of wine?" he asked when, passing through Pitchcot on their way, he saw the King's Rest.

Marsworth perceived that he was tired by their walk, and thought there would be little harm in giving way this once. Aubrey called for a bottle of claret in French (it must be remembered that he, at first, always spoke in French, which we have, of course, rendered into English here), and then had to get Marsworth to interpret for him. When the wine came he tasted it, declared that it was vile stuff, but drank, nevertheless, two or three glasses of it, and then, telling the waiter to put the rest aside for him till he should call in again, demanded to know what there was to pay. The servant mentioned the exorbitant price that was usual in those days, and was treated to a volley of fierce abuse by Dynton in return, which he, luckily, could not understand, or there might have been a regular disturbance. Marsworth, very much annoyed at the whole affair, explained to Dynton that the waiter had only charged the proper price, but it was with the greatest difficulty that he could convince him; at last,

he paid the money, and flounced out of the house with all the air of an offended prince.

The Principal and masters found it a very difficult matter indeed to classify this strange importation from the Continent. In modern languages, mathematics, and science, he was fit for, indeed far superior to, most of the Uppers; in classics he was a regular blockhead; while his knowledge of history and general literature was a jumble most indescribable, and a very hard matter to divide into sound, unsound, and positively noxious. In reality, he could properly belong to none of the regular school classes, so that it became quite necessary to make him an exception; and while he was an Upper as regarded living, rank, and some branches of studies, he was classed with Lovers in those matters wherein he was evidently deficient. Not that Aubrey Dynton had the slightest intention of undertaking the labour of study with any earnestness—for that he was far too lazy; besides, he had always been brought up to the idea that, as he was born to fortune, there was no necessity for exertion, and was content to believe that he only came to Kings Beeches to improve his English. Nor was he far wrong; that latter was actually the idea with which his parents had sent him to an English school, and on all other points they were quite indifferent. Worse than indifferent, for they never fostered in their boy any respect for wholesome discipline, nor for his superiors; but, on the contrary, supplied him freely with every inducement to

go wrong, in the shape of large sums of *private* pocket-money (a custom absolutely forbidden), with wine, jewellery, tobacco; in fact, anything he wished to write for; and as they were sent in secrecy to whatever place he chose to name, the only very prominent talent that Aubrey had—viz., one for intrigue—was positively encouraged. But, in spite of all his faults—and they were many and glaring—he gradually came to be liked at the Beeches; his winning ways, his light-hearted cheerfulness, his jocular temperament even when the joke was against himself, his grotesque anecdotic and burlesquing powers, his peculiarly sweet smile, and even his ludicrous first attempts at English, gained for him, for the first few months of his career, and for some time afterwards, many friends amongst both Uppers and Loweres; while most of the masters were likewise kindly disposed towards him. There was no denying his lavish generosity, and that one quality will always procure for its possessor troops of friends, both true and false. The truest of the former was Roger Marsworth, who saw germs of good in his *protégé* from the first, and was in great hopes of turning him out as good and true a gentleman as the average of boys trained at Kings Beeches. Certain it was that the elder boys looked down on the new-comer with considerable scorn; he was not very cleanly at times in his habits; he had, that worst of all personal signs in a boy, a nasty custom of biting his nails; there was a great deal of French swagger and bragg-

docio about him ; and, finally, his travelled experience of the world, his good-humoured cynicism, his philosophical assumption of superiority, and his real contempt for authority, placed him, in a measure, far above even the most manly of the Uppers in the estimation of the Lower, and hence the jealousy of the former. Unfortunately, too, the same reasons operated in making him despise the opinions and advice of his elders and betters for good, so that even Roger Marsworth found the greatest difficulty in meeting the laughing rebuffs of Aubrey to any strictures on his conduct. Truthfulness and honesty of character—not merely the facility for verbal lying—seemed to be quite unknown to him ; he had intentions and desires that must be carried out and fulfilled. If Monsieur Hook could not aid him, then Monsieur Crook *must*, and thus he generally attained his ends, while more straightforward or scrupulous lads were content to let things take their honest and natural course. All these faults, with many others we cannot allude to, he had ample opportunity of eradicating at Kings Beeches. Good men and good boys were not wanting in precept or example to show one so keen as Aubrey Dynton the error of his ways ; and it is the object of the following pages to record the results as evidenced in his further career.

“Aubrey Dynton !” called out the master of the Latin class one day when he was examining what were called (by courtesy) “verses” in that language.

“Yes, sir,” and Aubrey rose with a dancing-master’s

bow. A giggle ran round the class, for there was always some fun whenever our hero happened to be called upon for anything.

"Have you sent in a copy of verses with the rest?"

"No, sir."

"Why not? Did I not refuse to accept your excuse last time, and positively order you to send in some for this day?"

"Monsieur did order, and I did obey."

"Well, where are they?"

"I wrote, but did not send," and then he went on to explain that he was ashamed of his production—which was not the fact; but he hoped to get altogether excused from the exercise in question, which he hated, and had consequently kept them in his desk.

"Then go and fetch them."

Dynton went with a grotesque grimace and a most absurd depreciatory shrug of the shoulders, that set off his classmates in a regular titter of delight. In a moment or two he returned, and with great solemnity and some half-dozen bows, handed up his composition to the master, who just glanced at it, put it on one side, and asked—

"These are your own? entirely your own unaided composition?"

"Oh yes, monsieur; mine, all entirely."

"Very well; sit down," and the business of the hour was resumed.

"Aubrey Dynton!" called the master at the same class next day.

"Yes, sir!"

"Did you not tell me yesterday those verses were all your own?"

"Yes, sir; all my own."

"You are certain of that?"

Dynton looked round, as if he did not understand the question; but when it was plainly repeated to him in different terms, he firmly adhered to his former statement. The master looked very sternly at him for a moment or two—a look that Dynton bore without the slightest uneasiness—and then calling the whole class to attention, proceeded to read out, sentence for sentence, Dynton's verses with those of sharp little Harry Kelly, a noted friend and "suck" (so favourites were called) of "Johnny Crapaud's," as Dynton was universally nicknamed. Amidst the almost bursting laughter of the rest of the fellows, but to the utter dismay of Kelly, they were found to be almost word for word the same. Aubrey did not "turn a hair," as the expression goes, but looked as though the laughter of the others, and the stern gravity of the master, were utterly incomprehensible to him.

"Now, sir, what have you to say to that? Be cautious, for it is a serious offence."

"Offence, sir?" queried the other, with the most innocent air imaginable.

"Yes, offence, sir. Don't pretend to misunderstand

me. Did you, or did you not, copy those verses from Kelly's?"

"*Ma foi!* Yes, I copy them from Kelly," was the simple answer.

"And yet you told me they were your own composition, sir!" thundered the master, in a considerable rage at the coolness the other displayed.

"My own composition entirely, I say," repeated Dynton, still with the innocent expression on his face.

The whole class, including the other delinquent, Kelly, burst out laughing, and even the master himself could not refrain from smiling, though he was quite well aware that the innocence and simplicity were counterfeit. In the end Dynton explained that he *could* not write verses, and had copied them as the best way of getting over the difficulty, and that he understood the master's question as to their originality to refer to the *handwriting*. This explanation was so glaringly unlikely that a fresh roar of laughter extinguished all serious intentions on the part of the master, who contented himself with threatening—and they all knew he meant the threat—the direst punishment in a future similar case, not on Dynton, but on whoever should allow his lucubrations to be copied from.

Harry Kelly never helped him again in such a literal manner; but Marsworth, when he heard of the event, gave the real culprit a few lessons and some plain rules in the art of Latin versification; so that his future productions, though absurdly eccentric,

came somewhere within the limits of juvenile compositions of the sort.

"Now then, Johnny Crapaud! are you going to join your side at football, or not?" asked Martin Twyman, entering the play-room one damp, dreary spring afternoon, when the season was coming to a close. A lot of little chaps had sneaked away from their sides (all public games were compulsory at Kings Beeches) to warm themselves by the fire. Twyman, who was rather a bully, came to drive them out again, and while doing so detected Dynton, who had not been on the ground at all.

"I am not. *Ma foi!* it's very dirty game, that make me ill."

"Pretty fellow you are to talk of dirt! Why it's only clean mud; and you're dirty enough yourself to be a pig."

Dynton never could understand abuse; and in this attack he looked as one not comprehending a word that was said to him.

"Oh, don't pretend you don't know!" said the other, and he seized him by the shoulder and marched him up to where the game was in full progress. Dynton, like a born Frenchman, hated all outdoor games with a thorough hatred and contempt; but he had formed his own plan, and he hastened to put it in execution. After a while he pretended to enter into the game with exuberant spirits; he rushed here, there, and everywhere; he fell on the ground innumerable

times; he yelled and gesticulated most furiously round all the grand rushes and tussles, keeping, however, as carefully as possible out of all real danger; but at last he was fairly caught—the ball was kicked with great violence right into the pit of his stomach, and he fell to the ground in a soft slush of mud, uttering a most horrible yell as he reached mother earth. After a wild laugh the ball was kicked away from him, and for some time he remained unnoticed where he had fallen. Presently one of the junior masters, who was taking part in the game, came up to him and found he was bleeding violently from the nose. He picked up poor “Johnny Crapaud” and bid him go down to the College and wash himself. He took the advice; but, presumably through absence of mind, went in by masters’ door, and by good luck met the Principal. His nose was just then bleeding worse than ever, his whole appearance was ragged, muddy, and most dilapidated—he looked, in fact, such an object of misery, that the Principal took him down to his own chambers to refresh him with a glass of wine, and try some simple nostrum for stopping the heavy bleeding.

“Did the ball strike you on the face, then?”

“No, sir; but when I run much, then the nose he bleed for hours,” was the half-sobbed-out reply.

After that the Principal sent for the President of the school and forbade him ever again to force Dynton to play; and thus he escaped from taking part in a sport he both hated and feared. We must add, that there

were not wanting those who maintained that Aubrey Dynton had brought on the bleeding himself with a piece of pointed stick that was found suspiciously near the spot where he had fallen. However that may be, he escaped what he considered the great nuisance of the game, and in future spent his half-holidays over French novels, which his parents made no scruple of smuggling over to him, and then towards dusk he invariably disappeared without letting any one know where he went. On his return he usually smelt of scent, or some peculiar drug, prepared himself a cup of coffee over one or other of the play-room fires, and retired to bed, perfectly content with himself and with his afternoon.

As the days grew longer, Aubrey Dynton's half-holiday disappearances came to be more noted and remarked upon. More than once he was found suspiciously near an inn at Pitchcot without leave. The master who came across him the first time was an easy-going gentleman, quite willing to shut his eyes to any venial offence; but the second and third encounters, when he was discovered actually in the yard of the King's Rest, were made more serious matters of, and he was formally warned that no boy was allowed to enter any hotel or inn without special permission. Aubrey expressed, with the greatest politeness, his extreme regret "that ignorance, &c., &c.;" and the affair blew over. Roger Marsworth, under whose special guidance Dynton was somehow supposed to

be, prayed and begged of him to be more circumspect; pointed out that the smoking and drinking he was in the habit of giving way to, must always lead him into trouble at the College, in addition to the evils they were in themselves; and implored him, if he really must smoke, to lay the case before the Principal, who would perhaps give him a certain liberty in that respect.

"*Ma foi!* this old gentleman would take all my cigar, all my tabac, away; that's what he would say, *mon bon* Rogère, instead of giving me the permit you speak of."

He laughed out so jovially, and looked so completely natural and innocent over it all, that Roger found it impossible to treat the matter seriously any longer. That very evening Aubrey went off to the Beech Walk, to ruminate over one of his eternal cigarettes, and was rudely disturbed by a gruff voice in his ear, after he had taken a turn or two."

"Against rules, Master Dynton; quite against all rules!"

"Ha! *mon ami*, Red Peter Weskit! is that you? You me frighten with your sudden voice" (this in the softest and blindest tones); "will you not smoke one cigarette with me? Nay? Well, you will have de snuff—ha, ha, Red Peter Weskit—you the snuff, and I the smoke—it is a balance of us two!"

But Peter Westcott—who did not appreciate this specimen of an Anglo-French youth quite so highly as

did most of the others at the Beeches—failed to see “the balance,” as the youth called it, and informed the delinquent in unmistakable language that if he found him smoking again it would become his bounden duty to report him. Peter did catch him again, not once, but half-a-dozen times, until he saw at last that on this point Dynton remained incorrigible, and he was compelled to inform the Principal. Again he got “a good talking to”—by this time he could not plead his former ignorance of English; he was evidently picking up his proper tongue with great rapidity, though to the very last he spoke with a strong foreign accent, frequently also using French idioms—but he did not leave off his bad habit, and before long was once more in trouble on the same account, with the additional criminality of a strong smell of brandy from his breath. Then there was a regular hubbub; Monsieur “Johnny Crapaud” was visited with a severe imposition, which he hired a client of his to write out—the fraud was detected, and the stoppage of his pocket-money for a month was the result. He felt this punishment severely at first, but soon he laughed at it (as he did at most things), and told Roger Marsworth that he did not miss it at all.

“Well but, Aubrey, you really ought not to go on like this; you’re turning the Principal and all the masters against you.”

“Pouf! what care I for that, as long as my own dear Rogère keeps me in his—what you call?—in his good books?”

Marsworth laughed at this open bit of flattery.

“But you won’t be in my good books if you don’t keep out of mischief.”

“Then I reform—from this out, I reform—I am now virtuous man!” and he slapped himself on the breast with great vigour in proof of the stern and Brutus-like rigidity of his future good principles.

Not a week afterwards he was again taken “red-handed” in the act of smoking a huge cigar; the smell of brandy was again upon him strongly; and this time the Principal gave him to understand that a complete change in his habits must take place, or—they would be compelled to part.

CHAPTER II.

A BAD TOOTH OUT.

"GLORIOUS news for you, Aubrey!" cried Roger Marsworth, who was a great enthusiast for sport of all kinds, rushing into Aubrey Dynton's room one day, rather less than a twelvemonth after the latter had arrived at Kings Beeches.

"Ha! my Rogère; what is it, then?"

"Why, the fox-hounds meet to-morrow within three miles of this, and we Uppers—as many of us as like—can get leave to go."

Aubrey had been as anxious as he ever permitted himself to be about anything to see a meet of the hounds, but up to now they had always thrown off at too great a distance.

"Where is it, then?"

"At a covert the far side of Boydell Manor—a splendid place for seeing, and we shall be able to follow them for miles."

The two then eagerly commenced to make the necessary arrangements, and half-past ten the following day found them, in company with nearly all the Uppers, on Squire Boydell's ground, closely examining every detail of the meet, and speculating on the probable direction the hunt would take. Aubrey was intensely

interested in this, the first thing of the sort he had ever seen ; the magnificent horses, the natty grooms, and feather-weight second horsemen ; the dashing riders, from amongst some of the pick of England's best ; the hounds, the ladies, the equipages, and even the groups of gaping rustics — all came in for a share of his deep attention. Then the dogs were put in cover, and his excitement rose with every yelp from the hounds when crossing the scent. Presently one gave tongue most unmistakably ; a dozen rushed to the spot and acknowledged the challenge ; it was taken up generally ; and in a few more seconds the cheering shout, "Gone away ! yoicks, for'ard !" proclaimed that the fox had burst into the open. The hounds were speedily bounding over or dashing through the thick fence of the covert. "Hold hard, gentlemen ! hold hard, and don't ride over hounds !" was screamed out by the master ; they got clear, and went away at racing pace, the scent breast high, followed by a splendid field of horsemen ; and the onlookers, fired with the hunting taste that pervades the bosom of every true Great Briton, rushed away to the various points from which they thought the best view of the run could be obtained.

"Keep with me, Aubrey !" shouted Roger, as the other showed symptoms of breaking away to some rising ground on their right as they ran. Marsworth, who really knew a good deal about hunting, was right ; and leaving the tempting rise, he turned sharp to his

left, making for a hill some two miles off, from which, as it seemed, the hounds were running straight away. So thought the other spectators, as they laughed at Marsworth and "Johnny Crapaud" for a pair of fools who were losing all the sport.

"But he run away from there!" remonstrated Aubrey, half-blown already.

"You never mind; he'll turn under that very hill in half an hour, or I'll eat my hat!" The fox did turn as Marsworth had prophesied, and while they were comfortably seated, all alone, on the side of the elevation they had gained, the whole hunt swept past underneath them, so that they had a grand view of all without any further trouble.

"It was magnificent! it was superb!" cried Aubrey, when men and dogs and all had for the second time raced clean away out of sight, "and now I know what is the fox-hunting!"

"Precious little you know from that!" laughed out Marsworth. "But now we must be getting home; it's certainly more than five miles from where we are now, and I'm not at all sure of the way. Where are the other fellows?"

"Ah, great big fools! they run away just opposite to us; I cannot see them."

"Nor I either—they must be on the road back by now, and we had better do the same."

"All right, my Rogère; only have the pity on me; I have run much, and am fatigued."

"Why, what an old woman you are ! However, never mind, and I won't work you too hard. Slow and sure wins the day ; so come along."

Marsworth saw that his friend really was done up, and by the time (which was considerable, for they were much farther from home than Marsworth thought) they had arrived at the first village, Aubrey gave such evident tokens of exhaustion that he was forced to yield to his importunities by making a halt at the chief inn. Marsworth would not go in himself—declaring that he had no need for even a glass of beer—but sat down under a tree while Aubrey entered and called for some brandy and water. It revived and freshened him up considerably ; but unfortunately it also brought with it the usual desire for more, and Aubrey did not hesitate to indulge that desire even as he indulged every other one. Another glass was succeeded by yet another, until when Marsworth, becoming both impatient and suspicious, entered the hostelry, he found his companion decidedly "fuddled," to use no stronger term. Shocked and disgusted to an excessive degree, Marsworth became seriously alarmed when Dynton positively refused to walk any farther, and was forced to ask the landlord to lend them his own gig as soon as a horse could be found to draw it. There was a long delay before one could be procured, during which time Dynton got his legs up on an opposite chair and went off in a heavy stertorous sleep. At last the trap was pronounced ready ; with considerable difficulty Aubrey

was shaken awake again, but when he got into the gig and felt the fresh air playing on his heated forehead, he rapidly improved, and informed the terribly-put-out Marsworth that he "wush all ri' now," and as "sober as a judge." Marsworth shook his head in doubt; but there was no help for it, and he drove as quickly as he could along the Pitchcot road, because the gig was to be left at the King's Rest in that village. While Roger was paying the ostler on their arrival there, Aubrey Dynton managed to dodge past him into the Rest; the other followed as soon as he missed him, found him in the very act of swallowing a large tumbler of brandy and soda-water, and had just got him to promise to start at once for the College, when who should walk into the room but Red Weskit! At the earnest entreaty of Roger Marsworth—an entreaty almost made on bended knees—Red Weskit consented to say nothing whatever (for this once) of what he had discovered; and even allowed himself to be persuaded to help the young debauchee home and see him to bed without his state being remarked upon.

Aubrey Dynton did not of course regard this last escapade in anything like so serious a light as an English-bred young gentleman would have done; still he was serious enough when Roger Marsworth pointed out the ungentlemanliness of the act, the insane folly of the thing itself, and the fatal consequences that must inevitably ensue should he continue in the same course. He seemed thoroughly in earnest in his promises of

complete reformation, and, frightened probably by a stern threat of utter abandonment by his friend, he really did commence a thorough change of life.

Things went on very well with the hero of this memoir for a considerable time, and his *Fidus Achates* had no reason to think that the vows just mentioned had not been kept in their integrity, when an incident occurred that once more shook his faith.

A subscription was being made for one of the farm labourers who had met with a bad cart accident. Nearly all the boys willingly subscribed, but Aubrey Dynton, who was usually the most open-handed in affairs of this sort, excused himself now on the plea that he had no money. This declaration was made in the presence of one of the masters, who the very next night happened to be going past Aubrey's room-door, which was open, and hearing a crash, looked in. The occupant was sitting on the bedside, taking off his trousers, in doing which the pocket turned upside down, and nearly £5 in gold and silver had rattled out on the floor! He was at once reported for having concealed money in his possession; inquiries were instituted, when it was found that on that morning Aubrey had changed, surreptitiously, an order in Pitchcot without leave or licence of any sort. The postmaster also proved that Dynton had been in the habit of changing large sums at different times—committing, in fact, one of the most serious offences that the school rules took cognizance of. For it was justly laid down at Kings Beeches that any

pocket money sent to a boy should be known to the masters, for the reason that when known it ran much less risk of being mis-spent, while if it remained secretly in the owner's custody it could be put to improper purposes, and thus much mischief might ensue.

It was only by the most strenuous endeavours, and by using all the great personal influence that he had gained for himself with all the masters, that Aubrey Dynton was once more spared through the intercession they made with the Principal to give him one chance more after the due infliction of exemplary punishment. One portion of that punishment was, that until the end of the term Dynton should be absolutely deprived of all pocket-money — what had been found was sent back to his parents, with a request that they would abstain in future from sending him any—and that his letters should be opened in the presence of a master to prevent the receipt of further remittances; on these terms and with a succession of heavy impositions he escaped once more. Roger Marsworth was in great grief over it all; he was really very fond of Dynton, taking the greatest pleasure in his society when the latter saw fit to control the freedom of his tongue; while his own conversation, example, and upright, brave, thoroughly good conduct, of the truest English young-gentlemanly type, were ever-present lessons that surely could not fail to convince and convert the other. Aubrey Dynton, with great effusion and a tearful display of sentiment that was beyond all

doubt natural, made the most solemn vows of amendment after this last outbreak ; he seemed to enter into and examine himself thoroughly to get to the utmost depth of his faults, and he cheered and consoled Roger by the eagerness with which he turned over a new leaf and began to lead the steady, rational life of mingled earnest labour and lawful recreation that alone can bring true pleasure and happiness.

It was a cold, frosty day in early April, and the east wind howled bleakly round the old building with dismal whistlings and screeches as of lost spirits moaning over their eternal fate. Aubrey Dynton sat in his room in "Grecians' Grove," trembling with cold, as he tried to read a book lying before him. He had no fire, and the gas—turned on full as it was, although the hour was only ten in the morning—did but little towards warming the room, which was perhaps one of the coldest in the "Grove." The occupant was profoundly miserable, and in the very lowest spirits. He had been accustomed to brew himself, with a little French apparatus he had, a mug of coffee (sometimes with brandy in it) on very cold mornings during the winter ; but since the last *émeute* he had been absolutely without the means of purchasing the necessaries, and he suffered exceedingly in consequence. For a long time he mused bitterly over his position—a position of deprivation, be it noted, to which he had been all his life unaccustomed ; and then, unable any longer to endure the cold of his room and the acute pain of his

thoughts, he went down to the large play-room, where—for misfortunes even on a small scale never come single—he was unmercifully chaffed for his blue nose and generally wretched appearance by some hardy fellows who were romping there. Unhappy, out of sorts, and feeling a much “smaller” individual than he had ever felt before, he made his way back to “Grecians’ Grove,” where he spent the rest of the day in the biting cold, and presented himself the next day with a violent face-ache.

“But you must have advice, Aubrey,” suggested Roger Marsworth in his kindest tones, as Dynton sat cowering over the play-room fire in great pain.

But he refused point-blank with a shudder, at the recollection of an awful struggle he had had the previous year with the dentist, who finally extracted an enormous fang that had swollen poor “Johnny Crapaud’s” face as big as a melon. However, he grew worse and worse; he could do absolutely nothing at class-time; his eyes were red and inflamed through want of sleep; and at last the Principal (much against the sufferer’s will) positively ordered him to go into Buncombe the next morning but two after he had been first attacked. Dynton shuddered at the idea of facing the long cold twelve-mile drive; but there was no help for it, and he had to take his seat beside the ostler, who brought a gig from the King’s Rest for the journey, and start for the scene of his coming agony.

"Surely that's Dynton?" hastily remarked Mr. Parker, one of the masters, who that evening, about four o'clock, happened to be passing through Buncombe on his way home from London, with one of the Uppers, who had also been in town.

"It is, sure enough; swaggering—no, by Jove, *staggering*—along! What can be the matter with him?"

They were at a considerable distance when they first saw him, and at once hastened to overtake him. Dynton was going along at a good pace, staggering though he was, and in rounding two corners was lost to their view. In fact, they missed him altogether, so that, after wandering up and down two or three back streets, they were compelled to give up the chase in despair.

"Let us go to the Green Man," suggested Mr. Parker; "if he drove over, the trap will be sure to be put up there."

With a good deal of difficulty and delay they found the ostler from the King's Rest, who, without any demur, informed them that he was to meet Master Dynton at half-past five at the Buncombe Arms. The two at once made their way to that hotel, and were informed that the object of their search was in the billiard-room, where, sure enough, they found him lying on one of the couches, smoking a strong cigar to the accompaniment of some hot brandy and water, and evidently under the influence of liquor.

"I will bet two sovereigns to one," he was loudly

exclaiming, as one of the two players leant over the table to make a stroke, "he will not—*Diable!*" he burst out, in dismay, as he saw Mr. Parker enter the room.

"Dynton! Dynton! come away out of this at once!" said Mr. Parker, hurriedly going up to the wretched boy.

The players stopped and turned round to laugh. That laugh may be said to have, in a measure, ruined Aubrey Dynton for ever. It excited him to prove himself a man, and not a mere schoolboy who was caught out on a lark by an usher; and he turned round on Mr. Parker with drunken fury, to call him all the opprobrious names, in both French and English, that came readiest to his tongue. The more excited he became, the more the bystanders laughed, and the more the unhappy lad heaped up terms of scathing abuse on Mr. Parker's head. Human nature could stand it no longer. The master made a last effort to silence him and to persuade him to go away with them. He was met with only a fresh torrent of ridicule and foul names; so, pale, and trembling with horror, annoyance, and disgust, he at length turned on his heel, went out of the room with his companion, and left Aubrey Dynton to his fate, with a warning to the landlord that he had better be very careful how he acted as regarded his youthful patron. Mr. Parker and the other then drove off to Kings Beeches, and about an hour afterwards Aubrey Dynton was assisted to bed by the host

of the Buncombe Arms, who took the precaution of removing his candle and turning the key in the lock ere he left him for the night.

By ten o'clock the next day the Principal arrived at the hotel in Buncombe, and was at once shown up to Dynton's bedroom. The latter was just getting up, to the consciousness of sickness and a fearful headache. What had happened he knew only very confusedly, but there was a dull sense of shame and misery pervading his bewildered thoughts; and for once in his life, after a good splash in the ice-cold water had somewhat cleared his muddled brain, he felt truly repentant. But it was too late: the Principal entered, and in the coldest possible tone, informed him that he had discovered everything—that Dynton had never been to the dentist at all; that the face-ache was all malingering (this he had found out from the ostler at the King's Rest, to whom the lad had made a boast of it); and, finally, that he was aware of the real object of the journey—viz., to redeem a letter that was lying at the post-office for him, and cash a heavy order that it contained. He then ordered him to complete his toilet, and directed breakfast to be brought up to the bedroom. Aubrey Dynton could hardly touch a morsel; he did not at all know what was to happen, and the Principal absolutely refused to answer one single question. When the attempt at a meal was over, Dynton submissively followed down the stairs and out into the street. They made their way to

the railway station, where tickets for both were taken for London, and Dynton found that his luggage was on the platform duly labelled for the same place, with another portmanteau. That portmanteau belonged to the Principal, who never left the side of the quondam Kings Beeches student until he had handed him over to his parents in Paris, with the simple explanation that he had been expelled the school.

Roger Marsworth deeply lamented over the really perverted nature of his friend, which had led to such a result; but he could not but see that the sentence passed upon him, after so many times of forgiveness was absolutely just, and quite demanded in the interests of the other scholars.

Marsworth never saw Aubrey Dynton again after the expulsion. He often sought him when a year or two after he had completed the Kings Beeches course he was studying for the Bar in London; but the other evidently avoided him, and he gave it up in despair. Roger Marsworth, Esq., Q.C., is now a prosperous and most able barrister, and will ere long be an ornament to the judicial bench.

The less we say of Aubrey Dynton perhaps the better. His story is a most melancholy one, and the two brief chapters here presented are given with deep regret. Soon after being expelled from Kings Beeches, his father died, and Aubrey came into possession, as soon as he was of age, of an immense annual income. Be-

fore that period his early loose habits and ideas had become confirmed through the idle, dissipated life he led in London and Paris, and the utter neglect of his parents. Through family influence, he received a nomination to a commission in the Household Brigade, or Guards; but on applying for the necessary certificate of good conduct from his "place of education," the Principal at Kings Beeches refused to give him one, and he was rejected in consequence as unfit for Her Majesty's service. He then entered on a wild career of the most unbridled vice and extravagance, until in a very few years he had squandered all the money he could procure, besides heavily mortgaging the family estates. We need pursue his career no further—suffice it to say, that he was ruined utterly, and at length died in misery and destitution, alone and friendless, a victim to his own vices.





Story the Ninth.

"BILLY THE BOASTER."

NOW then, you fellows! come along if you don't want to be late," shouted Bertie Neville, one gloriously hot June day, to a lot of lads who were lounging under the trees in the Beech Walk, waiting to join a bathing party to Fulton's Ponds, some three miles away.

"Is Griffiths ready yet?" asked one lazy chap who was sprawling on the grass with his towels tied round his head, turban fashion.

Mr. Griffiths was the master who was to go in charge of the party; for none but Uppers were allowed out of bounds alone, and those now preparing to start were mostly Lowers.

"Ready? of course he is; has been waiting this half—"

"Don't say hour, Bertie," warningly put in Billy

Barrow; "for I saw him come out of masters' side not a second ago."

"Well, half-minute, I was going to say, 'Boaster.' Besides, you needn't be so particular; we all know what a chap you are for cramming."

"I'm not such a crammer as you!"

"You are; and worse!"

"I'm not—"

"Now then, now then, what are you two squabbling about?" asked Peter Sandys, loitering up to join the party, many of whom had already risen and were making their way to where Mr. Griffiths was standing

"Nothing, Sandy Peter; only 'Billy the Boaster' accused me of cramming."

"Well, so you do, both of you!" was the judicious retort, as they all moved off in the direction already taken by the master.

Fulton's Ponds, as some large sheets of water divided by narrow causeways were called, lay in one of the most picturesque localities near Kings Beeches, and were much preferred on account of their size and situation, as well as for other reasons, to the Pitch, or any of the still waters on the College estate. The walk to them was a delightful one; through deep, shady lanes; across broken and wild ground, where the rabbits scurrying about in fright or play were ever objects of intense interest; in and out of thick woods, full of all natural curiosities, both animate and inanimate; through bits of picturesque covert, where the young

pheasants were just beginning to be at home; and past pleasant woodland patches, cleared and fenced in for the cottages of the gamekeepers and assistants, who were thus on the very spot where their labours were most needed. The ponds themselves were almost entirely surrounded with woods and covert, and a sort of thick jungly scrub seldom seen in England, except on the southern coast; yet in places the banks were open, and covered with rich green grass, that looked all the brighter and more luxuriant from the contrasting sombreness of the trees and shrubs. Where the grass was, the land rose up from the water's edge pretty steeply, and on the face of these hills, or hillocks rather, many generations of Kings Beeches boys had by degrees burrowed holes, that were found most convenient for dressing-places. Besides, a trip to Fulton's Ponds could only be undertaken on a half-holiday, and therefore there was ample time for loitering, lounging, and resting by the way, with intervals for making practical investigations into the natural history of the locality, that were not always conducive to the well-being of the eggs, game, &c., of the proprietor.

On the afternoon in question, Bertie Neville and "Billy the Boaster," as Barrow was nicknamed, from a well-known failing of his, were sparring at one another all the way, telling tales of their own deeds of prowess, and exhibiting considerable ingenuity as well as rivalry in the wordy contest.

"Why, Bertie, you can't hold a candle to 'the Boaster.' Lor bless you! he has been everywhere, seen everything, and spoken to everybody you can mention," said Sandy Peter as they wound through a jolly dark grove that was full of game.

"Oh, I don't profess to be the equal of such a regular Baron Munchausen as he is!"

"Munchausen yourself! Look here, Sandy Peter; he turns on me this way just because I happened to mention—what is a positive fact, as I can show you when we get back, from letters and things—to him that I dashed into the sea at Ryde last autumn vacation and saved a man's life."

"Saved a man's life!" snorted Neville in great contempt; "why, you're as funky a chap in the water as a cat!"

"Yes, and the 'man' happened to be a little child of three, who was paddling up to its ancles on the shore and fell on its face! 'The Boaster' lugged it up again and set it on its legs, and then his old governor, who is a literary old bloke, got them to stick it in the papers!" indignantly narrated Denis Coles, whose regard for the truth was of the most stern and uncompromising character.

There was a general shout of laughter at this explanation, and poor Billy was chaffed nearly out of his life all the rest of the way. Not that it stopped his ridiculous stories one bit. A fellow who once gets into the habit of boasting of his own doings, soon loses

all regard for common sense and shame, and comes to hardly care at all for being found out. Billy was, however, a little annoyed at this last *exposé*, which he was quite unable to explain away, as Denis Coles was at Ryde when the affair happened, and he longed to have an opportunity of showing off his power of doing what he had said he had done—save a life from drowning. He did not feel very confident, though he really was an excellent swimmer, of dragging out a full-grown man; but he thought he was quite competent to rescue a small boy, provided he fell in in a safe place, where the glory might be made much of and the danger be at a minimum.

“By Jove, there’s a stunner!” shouted out somebody, as a splendidly-coloured butterfly rose from some wild flowers growing in the hedge dividing the grove from the field the party were just emerging into. Bertie Neville, a regular collector, made a dash after it, in his excitement flinging his cap far over the gaily painted beauty, which in consequence fluttered away a considerable distance.

“Pshaw! what an ass you are, Bertie,” laughed out Billy, who was also a very fair collector; “why if you had hit it, you would have ruined it completely. Just see how I’ll nail him; I’ve caught thousands in Germany this way.”

“Thousands in Germany! well I never!” piously interjected one of the group. However, Billy Barrow stalked the gaudy insect with great skill, marked him

down on a hollow-cupped flower, and with considerable dexterity netted him in his pocket-handkerchief without hurting an atom of his bloom.

"Bravo, 'Boaster!'" Peter Sandys encouragingly cried, "that's the first time I've ever known you to do anything you boasted beforehand about."

"Is it indeed? Oh, I'm not quite such a duffer as you fellows think; besides, I *can* always do what I say;" and the butterfly-hero plumed himself, as he set about securing his prize in a little pasteboard box he carried for the purpose.

"Yes, that's all very fine, but——"

"Ponds in sight!" yelled some one, and the whole party took to their heels and raced to the water, to secure the most comfortable dressing-holes.

Where the best swimmers generally assembled to make their dives, take headers, and perform every other aquatic feat they were capable of, was a high, narrow bank overlooking the very deepest part of the ponds, and rather unsafe, on account of the crowding, for a non-swimmer to pass along. Sandys, Bertie Neville, Barrow, and a whole lot of the smartest performers were assembled on this when they had undressed and got into their swimming costumes; they were trying all sorts of games and tricks on one another in their efforts to prove who was the ablest, so that at times the sport savoured rather of horse-play, and more than once Mr. Griffiths, who was sitting near, reading a book, had been pretty well splashed as a con-

sequence of their gambols in the water. Now Billy Barrow was possessed of a very tolerable share of cunning; he did not at all really relish the name of "Boaster" so freely lavished on him; so that he often endeavoured, by the exercise of his wits, to at least seem superior to his companions. He had been annoyed a trifle about the contradiction his life-saving story had met with, and he now sought by every means to tire out his companions, while making the least possible exertion himself, in order that he might be fresh and strong to perform all sorts of aquatic exploits when they were tired out. He got up races, in which he took only the parts of starter, umpire, and judge; he described and pretended to teach wonderful feats in diving, side-swimming, foreign styles, and all the rest of it, carefully abstaining from joining in them himself; and he cleverly contrived to weary them out while he remained as fresh as paint.

"Now I tell you fellows what we'll do—let's start fair and race for the island and back, and the chap that wins shall have a blow-up of tarts and pop stood him by the rest, at Mother Sleet's, on the way home."

"Well, but who's to start us?"

"Oh, we must start ourselves," was Barrow's answer. He meant to join in this, and win it if he could.

"That's jolly fine, 'Boaster;' we know your dodges; you'd give the word, and be five lengths ahead in your plunge before you gave it! None of that for me,"

said Bertie Neville, whose teeth were chattering through previous exertions, and being in the water so long.

“ Well, perhaps Mr. Griffiths will see us off.”

So it was arranged ; the lads placed themselves in a row, and were, at a word given by Mr. Griffiths—who would not, however, get up from where he sat—to make the best start they could for the prize, on the understanding that any one who failed to get off decently well was not to be called on to subscribe to the treat for the winner. The signal was given ; they all plunged in together with the exception of the “ Boaster,” who in his eagerness, and to his great disgust, slipped his foot, was at once hopelessly out of the race, and scrambled on shore again because he had no chance. Just when the swimmers had turned the island, a little fellow who had had enough of bathing in the shallow place reserved for those who could not swim, came running tremblingly along the narrow bank to regain his dressing-hole, was tripped up by Barrow as the latter stepped back to gain a better position to judge the winner, and fell into the deepest water with a loud scream ! In his instinctive exertions to save himself he got farther and farther from the bank, crying out fearfully all the time, until at last he sank. The “ Boaster ” stood cowering in terror on the bank ; all his presence of mind—his courage, if he ever had any—entirely deserted him at the suddenness of the affair, and when he *did* at last think, he remembered that the

boy had gone down in a spot where there were a lot of bottom-weeds growing very thick.

The lads who were racing saw the whole thing, and roared out, as well as they were able, to Barrow to save the drowning boy. Their shrieking roused Mr. Griffiths, who mistook the victim's yells—if he heard them at all—for part of the sport, and he in turn shouted, while running down to the spot, to Barrow :—

“Save him! for God's sake, jump in and save him!” But the “Boaster” had completely lost his head; and the poor victim rising to the surface again, Mr. Griffiths plunged in, clothes and all, just as he was, with a few vigorous strokes reached the spot, and dragged the exhausted little fellow in safety to the bank. A ringing cheer greeted the act of the master, while the “Boaster” received the most tremendous hissing and earnest abuse that he or any one else had ever had at the bathing-pond. The boy was considerably more frightened than hurt; still, he had been in imminent danger, and would most certainly have been drowned had much more delay in helping him taken place. Mr. Griffiths had a pair of bathing-drawers in his pocket; so he took off his clothes, and placed them to drip and partially dry in the sun, while he enjoyed what he called a “regular” swim, in contradistinction to the unintentional one he had just had.

Billy Barrow was terribly downcast after what had just occurred, and stood in sullen wrath listening to

the bitter chaff and even loud personal abuse that was freely showered on him for his cowardly negligence on the occasion. No one spared him in the least; they contrasted his "tall talk" with the pusillanimity of his recent conduct; they called him a barefaced and cruel humbug to his face; they splashed him and flung mud at him in open contempt; and one or two were for there and then giving him a jolly good "smothering" in the water to serve him out. His attempted excuses they laughed to scorn; they laughed louder when he tried to prove that the boy was in no danger at all, and that he (the "Boaster") had left him alone on purpose—"just to see what Griffiths would do!" And they laughed loudest of all when one of the smallest of the small boys came up with two handfuls of the foulest slush to be found in the adjacent ditches, and flung the stinking stuff right in Barrow's face. But the worst of all were Bertie Neville and Denis Coles, and whenever there seemed to be the slightest lull in the storm of objurgation, those two set all the boys on again worse than ever.

"I tell you what it is, 'Boaster,' " whispered Peter Sandys in his ear, "you must shut up the mouths of those two fellows, or you'll never hear the end of this. I'll tell you what you'll do; there's a moor-hen's nest in those sedgy bits over there"—pointing to a distant part of the pond, on the opposite side—"you swim quietly over there, fetch the eggs across, and if you divide them between Bertie and Coles they'll shut up fast

enough." The two named were noted naturalists (from a schoolboy point of view), and they would have taken the eggs long before for their collections only they were afraid of the keepers, who had strict orders that these birds should not be interfered with. The "Boaster" saw at once a fine chance of turning the discussion away from his recent unfortunate act of cowardliness, so he plunged into the water without more ado, and made for the place pointed out by Peter. It was a good long swim, even for such an adept as was "Billy the Boaster," but he held on his course in good style until he felt the ground beneath his feet, when he paused to take a much-needed breath and look around for the nest. He could see no signs of one; but the shouts and pointed directions of Sandys on the bank he had left gave him some clue as to its whereabouts, and he crept up the soft black ooze of the bank till he was a walking mass of filthy mud, so sticky and foul that he saw at once there was no chance of his getting it off until he should return to the opposite side and absolutely groom himself with wet coarse grass. He gained *terra firma* at last, peering about in every direction, but still unable to detect any signs of the prize. But the wavings of hands, pointings, and directions from the other shore led him on and on till he was finally stopped by some very thick scrub that grew down to and completely overhung the water.

"There! down there!" came the shout from the

other side; but he could see nothing. In the hopes of getting a better view, he laid hold of a pendant branch of a tree and leaned over the prickly mass as far as he could, so as to know the spot, and reach it when known, by entering the water again and swimming round to it. In his eagerness (now that his nasty job seemed about to be finished) he leaned too far, and stirred the thorny stuff; under his very feet a moor-hen flew out; he started, as he had not expected that she could be so close, lost his balance, and tumbled headlong into a regular wilderness of strong, sharp thorns, that tore his flesh cruelly as he crashed through it. With considerable difficulty, and bleeding all over, he extricated himself from the cruel grasp of the piercing spines that held him in a close embrace, and backed out into deep water again, covered from head to foot with great gashes and scores caused by the cutting points of the briars. A loud jeering cry reached his ears from his schoolfellows, and, determined not to face any further chaff through want of success, he cautiously approached the spot once more, and as he swam round and round it, peered eagerly for the nest. At last he saw it—right under the thorns in some thick sedgy stuff—and without much further difficulty, was able to get sufficiently close to handle the eggs. But then arose another difficulty; tired out, sore, cut all over, and pretty well exhausted altogether, he would never be able to carry them in his hands, which were essentially necessary, in his then state, to help him when swim-

ming across. What was he to do? Another mocking cheer reached his ears; he determined that he would not return without them; so, for want of a better place, he put as many eggs as it would hold in *his mouth*, and at once started on his homeward-bound journey.

When about two-thirds of his way across the pond, he began to feel very faint, and a horrible dread came over him that he would sink, as the little boy had done under his very eyes, and who would or could help *him* out? However, no such fate awaited him (though he would have richly deserved it), and he was within a yard of the bank on which his schoolmates were standing when, as had been hurriedly pre-arranged when they had observed where he had stowed away the eggs, they all jumped into the water right on top of him. In the horrible confusion, alarm, and real danger, of course all the eggs in his mouth were broken, and he was dragged ashore more dead than alive, with the putrid contents of the half-hatched abominations streaming out of both corners of his mouth. He lay on the bank, deadly sick, and vomiting fearfully, for nearly half-an-hour; but no one took the slightest notice of him, and when, at the end of that time, he was able to stagger to the hole where his clothes were, he found that all the party had gone home except Bertie Neville and Denis Coles, who had been left by Mr. Griffiths to watch him lest anything serious might befall the miserable and crestfallen

"Boaster." You may be sure they did not show him one atom of mercy, and they never ceased, the whole road home, to talk on the disgusting subject of a mouth and throat full of rotten eggs.

For days and days after that adventure Billy Barrow could hardly eat anything, so great was the nausea occasioned by the very thought of his vile water-banquet, while for the whole of the remainder of his time at Kings Beeches he never heard the end of the affair, nor could he ever abide the name of Fulton's Ponds. But it must not be supposed that this mishap cured him of his habit of boasting; it certainly mitigated it for a time, but a boaster can never be entirely cured, and Billy Barrow is as strong a hand at it now as he was on the morning of the day when he swallowed the putrid eggs.

What became of him? Well, nothing very serious, and yet something that appears ludicrous. He had originally been intended for one of the learned professions, in which, through his father's influence and wealth, he might have made at least a first-class start; but Mr. Barrow, who was a clever, far-seeing man, soon came to know, as his son grew older and older, that the habit of idle boasting grew stronger and stronger; so he determined that such a quality must have some use in life, and he looked about for a sphere wherein it could be employed to the utmost advantage. After much inquiry, discussion, and deep thought, he

discovered there was only one line in life that would really suit his son, and to that he put him.

Billy Barrow is now an auctioneer, and lies professionally with peculiar pleasure and profit whenever he gets a chance.





Story the Tenth.

A RECORD OF GLAMOUR.

CHAPTER I.

BEWARE !

O—OO—OO ! it's awful cold, and I think I'll get into bed now," shivered out little Freddy Dixie, one dreary night at the end of September, leaning over the partition in the bottom dormitory that separated his small chamber from that of his friend Johnny Wolf. A fierce equinoctial gale was raging round the ancient walls, pinnacles, and turrets of Kings Beeches, rattling at the casements with furious energy, moaning and whistling down the long dreary passages and corridors, and shaking even the stern old oaken timbers that formed no inconsiderable portion of the quaint building. The two dormitories in which nearly all the Lowers were

quartered were immense rooms, specially built for the purpose, one above the other, and connected at either end by long winding stone staircases that continued their corkscrew courses down to the ground-floor, the school, play, and class-rooms. There were in addition numerous other ways of entrance and exit to these huge sleeping apartments; in fact, they were so constructed, or interwoven rather with the older portions of the entire building, that the "runs" in a rabbit-warren would be easy to comprehend and trace out in comparison with this tortuous network of surrounding passages, staircases, and general approaches. Down the centre of each dormitory ran a narrow matted passage, on either side of which opened the little wooden partitioned rooms—one being allotted to each boy. The gas-lights at the best were few and feeble, but when all were supposed to be in bed these lamps were turned down to "blue-light," with the result that a certain mysterious gloom prevailed, rendering every object—and they were very few—indistinct, confused, and almost totally different in appearance from their normal shape.

Freddy Dixie was standing on a chair placed on his bed when he gave utterance to the above remark, and was trembling with cold and fear as he leaned close against Johnny Wolf, who was similarly placed on his side of the partition.

"Oh, don't go yet, Freddy; please don't," entreated the latter, in the most distressed and pleading tones

that fright could suggest; "*it* will be here just now, and what shall I do? I'll scream out if you move!" he went on, as the other showed symptoms of retiring to the level of his warm bed. Dixie knew the result of a scream would be that they would both be well flogged for communicating over the partitions—barriers that were supposed to be sacred and insurmountable—so, cold and trembling as the two little fellows were, they still remained in their most uncomfortable position, waiting to see a ghost—yes, a real ghost! Johnny Wolf, whose shaking limbs and deadly pale face were sufficient proofs of his sincerity, had that morning told his neighbour of a dreadful apparition that had peered into his little room the previous night, and they were now close on twelve o'clock, cowering in expectation of another dread visit. The old turret clock chimed midnight; the watchers seemed to experience a sort of ice-cold air-bath floating around them; a low hollow groan of mortal pain from the far end of the centre passage broke on their terrified ears, and Freddy Dixie, in an agony of fright, scaled the partition and landed beside Wolf, who had broken out into a cold perspiration of sheer terror. Again there was the same fearful groan, but farther off; and it was repeated three times, as though the *thing* was moving away. The two young fellows began to pluck up a little spirit—perhaps it was the courage of despair, perhaps it was the fascinating curiosity of intense fear; but however, it was, they crept, closely locked in one

another's arms, to the heavy curtain that acted as a door, pushed it aside, and peeped out. At the very extreme end of the passage they saw a tall, shadowy form, apparently wrapped in a monk's black cowl, standing with its covered head bowed towards the ground, and the right hand crossed on the breast. Freddy Dixie gave a little instinctive shriek of terror as he took in these details; Wolf fell panting with horror against the partition; and the *thing* (they could not think of it even by any name) slowly faded away without visible motion! The two lads crept into Wolf's bed in silent terror, and not one word passed between them on the subject of what they had seen, although it was early morning before either fell off into a troubled doze.

Next morning there was considerable agitation amongst the little boys of the school. The ghost story was paramount in interest; for although the two who had seen it were too much frightened to enter into full particulars to any one, they could not refrain from whispering to their greatest intimates some hints of what had happened, and thus the story, but in a very timid and mysterious way, spread through the greater part of Lower boys, till an uneasy feeling was generated that gradually spread upwards.

"Yah! what a set of fools you must be," cried David Corbett, who feared nothing dead or alive, when the story reached his ears; "what do you think an old dead monk would come groaning into the dormitory

for? Why, that part wasn't built for hundreds of years after the monks were kicked out of the Beeches!"

"Besides," added Dicky Banks, a practical chap, who had a knack of submitting everything to analysis, where possible, "there's no such things as ghosts now, if there ever were. Why should there be? If they're dead they can do nothing here, nor can live people do them any good, so what would they come for?"

"Why, Banks knows too much for a Lower—the Principal should shove him up into us," sneered Coxon, who had not been long an Upper himself, and consequently pretended to despise the Lowers much more than any one else.

"I know more than a fool like you, any way," muttered Banks. It was hardly etiquette, unless a regular row was about to be raised, for a Lower to attempt to controvert the opinions of one above him.

"My grandfather had a ghost at home," sententiously remarked young Belton, as if he was talking of a horse or a cow. "Kept on the premises, and available at a moment's notice—blue-fire and sulphur fumes always ready to be turned on!"

"Bravo, Belton, you're the man for my money!" laughed Joe Smithers, a monkey-faced Upper of supercilious manner, with a miserable ambition to be as different as possible from his companions, that constantly led him to despise, or at least pretend to despise them.

"It's a fact though!" stoutly maintained Belton, who was as determined a fellow as there was in Lowers,

and fonder, perhaps, of a joke than any of them ; so he thereupon launched out into particulars as to his grandfather's familiar spirit, with the effect of making the most of the elders who heard him laugh consumedly in their sleeves ; while the youngsters were, as a rule, very differently affected, and had their faith in the supernatural wonderfully quickened. However, the uneasy feeling was undoubtedly on the increase in the school, so that one or two of the more plucky members of the bottom dormitory determined to watch, and thus knock the silly story on the head before it really gained any firm footing amongst their weaker comrades.

"It's all my eye and Betty Martin !" shouted Jerry Townsend, a funny chap, and one always ready for a joke, when the "Vigilance Committee," as he called the watchers, made their report, vowing that they had neither seen nor heard anything during the week they had kept guard in turn, and declaring that young Dixie and Wolf should be well thrashed for trying to humbug fellows so. In mercy to the frightened youngsters the recommendation was not carried into effect, and the dormitories, both top and bottom, were once more at peace.

"Wolf! Wolf!—Wolf, do you hear that?" and Freddy Dixie actually shook the partition, he was trembling so, as he hung over it in terror and whispered desperately at his sleeping comrade. But Wolf, tired out with a severe game of football, slept the sleep

of the wearied, and Dixie had again to scale the boards and drop down in his bed ere he woke up with a start. Again the low hollow groan of agony, but this time from the opposite end of the dormitory (the two lads' partitions were almost in the centre), and again and again was the same dread sound repeated! Terrified beyond measure, the lads fell down on their knees and tried to say some prayers; yet they *could not* resist the fascination seeming to force them to look on the *thing*, and again they peered out at one side of the curtain. This time, though they did not then know it, they were not alone in their fright; a little further down, on the same side, Jerry Townsend, and even the practical Dick Banks, were disturbed by *something*, and they too heard the groans that so frightened the others. The former was a deal more funny than brave; and when he had so boldly declared the ghost was "all my eye," &c., he had had a secret misgiving on the subject, and was, in fact, airing his courage at the expense of his reverence for the truth. He was very considerably frightened, therefore, when suddenly roused by the mysterious *something*—he could not for the life of him say *what* it was—and his knees knocked under him as he whispered to Banks in the next compartment, who also had been awakened by the same unknown power. Cautiously they peeped out together, and the blood ran cold in their veins as they beheld (what the two little fellows were at the same time, with frozen hearts, gazing on) the tall shadowy figure, clothed

in the monk's cowl, standing at the very end of the passage, and uttering the harrowing groans they had heard of. Then the head was very slowly raised up from the ground, towards which it had been bent, and a ghastly, deadly-white face was exposed to their view, with the eyes glaring out in a bright luminosity that was positively appalling. For once the practical mind of Dickie Banks failed him, and instead of rushing forward to question the unearthly being he trembled to see before him, he sank down on the foot of his bed with the exclamation—

“Good Heavens! what *can* it be?”

Jerry Townsend, his teeth ringing like a pair of castanets, fell back in haste from the curtained doorway when he found himself thus deserted, determined that he would cut no more jokes at ghost stories of any kind. But presently Banks came to himself, and began to reflect that this must be some silly practical joke—some imposture easily to be found out—and he called (of course in a whisper) to Jerry not to be afraid, but look out with him again, so that they might know what to do. Townsend managed to pluck up a little courage, slipped hastily into the compartment Banks was master of, and the two once more—just after a longer groan than before had issued from the monk—looked out from their doorway. The great luminous eyes of the figure seemed to glare on them with a cruel hard persistence; a moan of tenfold strength and dismal sound burst from it; it raised its right hand, from

where it had rested over the heart, slowly and with apparent great pain, displaying a fearful gash, as though clothes and all had been cut right through, while a piece of linen protruded, stained and actually dripping with the heart's blood of the victim! Terrified out of all sense of what they were doing, the four lads almost simultaneously screamed out; but before they had all done so, the figure replaced the right hand over the horrid wound, and with a hoarse, hollow whisper of "Beware!" disappeared from their gaze. A number of fellows were roused from their slumbers by the cries of the four; but as the latter had instinctively drawn within their partitions when they saw the horrid gory sight, they (on coming to their proper senses once more) prudently remained there, and the other fellows knew nothing of what had occurred until the next morning.

CHAPTER II.

A TRAP TO CATCH A GHOST.

"So there *are* such things as ghosts, eh, Master Dicky?" laughed out Coxon, the first time he met Banks after he had heard of the occurrence just described. The latter flushed up a fiery red. He had tried to keep his share in the transaction a secret, for he felt heartily ashamed of his conduct; but there was no trusting Jerry Townsend (who made a joke of the affair now that it was over), and the whole story was all over the school by breakfast-time.

"Watch for yourself and see!" was the somewhat sullen answer as Banks withdrew from the chaff with which he had been greeted.

"Couldn't think of such a thing after the philosophical Banks has pronounced it genuine!" was the sneering retort shouted after him, and a volley of laughter told how highly it was appreciated.

"But what do you really think of it, Coxon?" asked an Upper, named Thompson, rather timidly. Thompson was known to have expressed some sort of mitigated belief in the first story, and had been well joked in consequence.

"Think of it? I think, of course, that it's the

greatest rot out. That's what every sensible fellow thinks, I hope."

"Let's have the whole four of them in the library and pump the entire story out of them," suggested Dawkins, a great brawny Yorkshireman, who was currently supposed to believe in nothing at all that he did not see.

"All right," said Coxon; and the four were at once sent for, while the Uppers, who were discussing the question, adjourned to their own library to receive them.

"I vote, if we find out that there really is some chap frightening these little chaps, that he has a public thrashing," said Joe Smithers, lounging across a book-ladder. Joe had a good deal of talent for science, languages, drawing, and things in general, that made him rather a prominent leader amongst what may be called the junior Uppers; but his influence would have been much greater were it not for a sort of cowardly cruelty that pervaded his every act, joined to a low cunning, as evident to those who watched him closely as it was unpleasant. Besides that, his inordinate vanity kept him constantly seeking power, and therefore it was, as a matter of course, denied him as much as possible by his compeers. However, he was certainly very clever, and cleverness will tell to a certain extent, whether joined with good or bad qualities.

"That's all very fine, Master Joe; but who are you going to thrash? How will you find him out?"

"Pooh ! if they really did see anything, and are not scheming or imagining, we can easily find the fellow out, and then Heaven help him !"

Just then, Dixie, Wolf, and Jerry Townsend were ushered into "The Presence" (as the latter called it); but Banks was *non est*—he having wisely cut away and hid himself when he heard what was going on.

The three repeated their story nearly exactly as they had told it before—all but Jerry, who added no few fresh facts evolved from his own teeming imagination—and were quite of one mind in their description of the gash and the bloody white cloth hanging out from the wound.

"But why a *white* cloth ? Monks, of the days when monks were here, did not wear shirts, I believe?"

"No," said Coxon thoughtfully, "I don't suppose they did ; it's all a swindle, and we must try and catch the fellow that does it. But you say there was blood ?"

"Oh yes, dripping blood !" they all three chorused.

"If it was dripping, some of it must be there still," suggested Smithers.

"By Jove ! so it must," echoed Dawkins, with a laugh. He did not seem to believe a word of what he had heard.

"Let's go and see," said Coxon ; and the whole party adjourned to the bottom dormitory.

Sure enough, they found on the floor, just where the three said the monk stood, dark clotted stains. Coxon took some up on the point of a knife, and a

thrill of unfeigned horror went through the group when he put it in lukewarm water and it proved really to be blood!

"Now what's to be done?" asked Coxon, a good deal staggered by the result; but no one seemed able to reply for some time.

"Well, the only thing is to watch, and——"

"Pshaw! what's the good of watching any more, Smithers? Some fellows *did* watch; and of course the ghost did not put in an appearance!" remarked Dawkins. "Besides, in the dark, any chap playing a joke could be off in the rookery of passages."

"I'm afraid it's no joke," insinuated the quiet Thompson, who was impressionable.

"What bosh! I say again, let us watch closely, and if the fellow shows up, let us at once turn the gas on full flare, and then rush out and nail him." That seemed to be the only chance; so a regular watch was established, of which Smithers, whose energy was very great, was one of the principal members, and busied himself organising those who chose to join it into regular reliefs—so many hours on guard and so many off—which would keep two boys constantly on the look-out until the mystery was cleared up. The arrangement was kept as secret as possible, on the suggestion of Dawkins, who wisely argued that if they wanted to make a capture it should be confined to only just enough of the scholars as would be requisite for furnishing the reliefs.

For a week or so there was no further appearance of the mysterious figure; Dixie and Wolf began to rest better at nights; Jerry Townsend recommenced his jokes about the ghost; the practical Banks wondered what on earth he could have been dreaming about not to have rushed out and seized the impostor the night it had appeared to him; and even some of the lazier members of this new "Vigilance Committee" began to doze when on watch, thinking that now all danger was past, or, rather, that the ghost had become frightened of the preparations made to receive him, and had retired to his own regions, wherever they might be.

These suppositions, however, turned out to be fallacious; for one night, just after midnight, when the tired guards were asleep on their posts—that is to say, on their beds, outside of which they were lying dressed—a series of distinct raps were heard all along the partitions on both sides of the bottom dormitory, just as if some one running at tremendous speed had knocked as he ran; and fully a third of the boys sprang from their beds to see what was the matter, and did see—the monk standing at the farthest end, his dead-white face glaring at them, the bleeding gash over the heart distinctly visible, and his eyes fearful in their luminosity! But it was only for a portion of a second.

"Turn on the gas!" shouted Banks, running towards the nearest burner.

"Beware! Light not!" the figure hoarsely com-

manded ; and the blue lights in all the lamps flickered for a second and then all went out ! The whole dormitory by that time was awake, and the wildest confusion and terror reigned supreme. The little boys screamed as they ran for safety into one another's partitions ; the elders were little less terrified, though of course they were not so demonstrative about it ; the guards were soundly rated by such of the Committee as happened to be in that dormitory ; while many, who had not been roused up in time to see the monk, were rubbing their eyes, and asking in eager astonishment, "What on earth is the matter ?"

"Matter enough," answered the changeable Jerry Townsend, who was once more in profound horror at what he had seen for the second time ; "matter enough—he has been here again. Ugh ! it's really awful !"

"Who's got a match-box ?" called out Banks, who was trying to restore order in some degree ; "let us see where the villain can have made off to."

It was some time before one could be procured ; and, when it was found, not one of the matches would light. The little boys were more frightened than ever at the prospect before them of a night to be spent in a haunted room without a light. Another box was handed up to Banks ; but it too failed in its duty, so that it was quite five minutes—it seemed as many hours to the little fellows—before a welcomed match would strike ; and then one of the lamps was lit, then another, and yet another, until the whole dormitory was as well

lighted up as it could be. Then, and not till then, was courage mustered up to go and survey the spot where the ghastly monk last stood. Nothing, absolutely nothing—no trace whatever—could be found; and the amazement and consternation increased tenfold, on account of the increased mystery.

“Shall we go and wake up Coxon, or Smithers, or some of the Uppers?” was the suggestion thrown out by Jack Belton.

“What stuff!” answered Banks; “and have them all laughing at us again?”

“Is there any—any—blood this time?” stammered out Jerry Townsend, in his usual state of teeth-chattering. Banks stooped down to look, moving about on his hands and knees as he prosecuted his search. Suddenly he bounded to his feet, and looked at his right hand. It was smeared with fresh blood that was still warm! He recoiled from the spot with an irrepressible cry of horror; and very few indeed of the bottom dormitory boys slept any more that night. Next morning the story was over the whole school, and a general state of actual fear set in amongst the Lowers.”

“I for one won’t believe it,” said David Corbett determinedly, when the tale, with no few exaggerations, was told him; “and I only wish I was in the bottom dormitory to try a fall with Mr. Ghost!” Some few fellows (of his own dormitory) admired his pluck, but they were shouted down by the experienced

ones who had seen both the ghost and the blood, as rash fools that would believe in nothing.

Corbett's courage was tried sooner than they expected; for that very night the monk broke new ground, and appeared, on the stroke of midnight, in the top dormitory. David was sleeping the sound sleep of the just and the brave, when a shrill cry of terror echoed through the room. He bounced up in his bed and called :

"What's that?"

"The ghost! the ghost!" came in accents of intense anguish from young Tom Miller, and Corbett at once jumped on to the ground, flung open his front curtain, and saw standing at the end of the passage, the monk, the dead-white face, the luminous blood, and all that he had heard so much about. He ran back and slipped on his trousers. "Beware!" echoed sepulchraly through the dormitory. He rushed out, and down the passage towards the figure, which stood quite still; something caught his foot; he fell forward on his head with a tremendous crash that woke up all the rest of the boys; and when he got on his feet again, half-stunned, and utterly confused, the ghost was gone. His face was covered with blood—he had fallen right on his nose—nor were there any traces whatever of the thing that had tripped him up! On making inquiry, it turned out that Tom Miller—a regular *gobe-mouche*, who had been in a fearful state of fright ever since the thing had first been seen below—was the lad who had first heard the groans. In looking out,

he had caught sight of the monk, and immediately gave vent to the yell that had roused up Corbett. Miller also declared—he said he could swear it most positively if it was necessary—that when Corbett fell, the monk again bent his head, covered up the fearful heart-wound with his arm, then rose and rose in the air, like a pillar of smoke, until he finally disappeared in a fleecy sort of cloud, while heavy fumes of sulphur pervaded the place. There was a smell of sulphur beyond all doubt; but David Corbett shook his wounded head all the more when he heard of it, with a vehement declaration the he “would be one too many for the scoundrel yet.” After that, the boys were thoroughly roused, so that for some nights nearly every one watched, but without result. Once, indeed, just before daybreak, *both* dormitories were visited at precisely the same time by the monk (habited, and otherwise appearing in just the same state in both rooms), who gave utterance to one long warning cry, “Beware!” and then at once disappeared. That was its last appearance for the remaining portion of the winter, so that when the new year with the early spring gradually came round, the intense interest in the affair began to die out, until at last hardly any one remembered, or at least thought much of, the monkly visitant from another sphere.

CHAPTER III.

ILL OMENS.

"GIPSIES! here's a jolly old gipsy-woman and her lot," shouted Jack Belton, running into the play-room one fine afternoon in the early summer-time. A lot of the lads trooped out, for fortune-telling was a forbidden luxury, and therefore indulged in on every possible occasion—that is to say, about once a year or so.

"Now then, my brave lads! who's for having his fortune told—his real fortune, mind ye—what he is, what he was, and what he will be?" the old woman broke out in a shrill, cackling voice as they came up to where she was squatted, in a hidden nook of the shrubbery that ran round the cricket-field. A tall, sallow man, with a wonderful keen countenance, leaned against a tree, smoking a short pipe; while at a little distance, apparently absorbed in thought, crouched on her haunches a remarkably handsome young woman, with the swarthy complexion, the raven hair, the piercing black eyes, and the splendid teeth of her race. She was wrapped in an old scarlet cloak, with a hood; but it was not in use now, and her long hair streamed unkempt in the pleasant southern breeze. There was an awe-inspiring look about this woman, that no few of



THE WOODS OF KING'S BEECHES.

the lads felt the influence of as she sat staring at the downs in front of her, apparently scanning eagerly—nothing.

“Now, my bold boys!” went on the old mother, “cross my hand with silver or gold, and I’ll tell you what the stars say of you.”

Tom Miller shyly went up to her, and slipped a shilling into her hand, while the other fellows pretended to laugh, although they nearly all had a vague feeling that there was “more in this sort of thing than people think, you know!”

The hag examined the hand held out for her inspection closely, and then, looking Miller straight in the eyes, began to patter some stuff about Miller’s character more than his fortune—saying he was now weak and credulous through not being able to take his own part, but in the year something would happen that would change all that, and then he would turn into a strong, brave man, and win a large fortune. Several other palms were afterwards submitted for her inspection, and of all the owners she gave vague general characteristics rather than their future fates. Some of the Uppers had strolled up, and stood jeering at the prophecies which the old lady was so chary of giving in other than a general way.

“No, no, you’re a’most a man,” she said, as Dawkins held out his great Yorkshire fist. “I deal with no men. You must go to my gal, Miriam; she’ll tell if she chooses, and she won’t if she chooses; so there it is.”

All this time the daughter had sat in her old position, seemingly unconscious of what was going on around her. Dawkins and the other Uppers went towards her—the youngsters were frightened rather at her wild appearance, and stuck round the old woman—and the former asked if she would tell his fortune? She took his right hand without rising, bent her glowing eyes on it for a second, and then dropped it contemptuously:

“There’s no fate there!” she said in a low, sweet voice, that was very scornful; “no fate but the squire’s fate—the three B’s and M.”

“What’s that?” asked Dawkins, quite disconcerted.

“Beef, bread, beer, and money. Don’t trouble me more!” She resumed her still, gazing attitude, looking into space for things that other beings saw not.

“’Jove! she’s a rum un,” said Coxon; “try her some other fellow. You, Joe; you’re just the chap, with that monkey-face of yours, to have ‘fate’ enough for any gipsy of the lot.”

Joe Smithers did not like being called “monkey-face” particularly, but he did like being supposed to have a “fate” superior to or different from the common run of lads; for he thoroughly despised commonplace, besides having an actual dread of falling into some tame path of life similar to every other ordinary mortal; so he dropped half-a-crown into the young woman’s lap, and held out his right hand with a curious sort of half laugh. The gipsy did not take the slightest

notice of the action for some moments; then she looked suddenly up, caught Smithers' hand in her brown fingers, and peered into the deeply-indented marks on it intently.

"Evil! evil! all evil as yet!" she muttered hoarsely, and totally different from the silvery tones she had before used; then she suddenly looked up in his eyes with a piercing glance, and asked, "Why have you interfered with those long dead? Why are those lucky ones who see the monk to be beaten? Go!" she angrily ordered, dropping his hand, "If you want to know your future you must look in the 'mirror of fate' in the tent; the daylight cannot look on it when you despise the dead!" Again she gazed out on vacancy, and not one word more could any one get from her.

"'Jove, Smithers, that's a lesson to you not to interfere with the monk again. I always told you there was something in it," remarked Thompson, as they walked down towards the building when the bell rang for studies. Smithers was very thoughtful over it all, and merely muttered something in reply.

"How the deuce did she know anything about the ghost?" anxiously asked Banks, who had been unquestionably startled by Miriam's language and conduct.

"Pooh! some of the small boys have been gossiping to the servants, of course," answered Coxon.

"I don't think so; no one, not even Red Weskit,

seems to know anything about the affair," said Dawkins, who well knew that the fellows would be afraid to let any one on masters' side know of their fears from such a cause.

"Know it, or not know it, it's very strange she singled me out as the one who threatened a thrashing to any fellow who pretended to be the ghost. There's more in it than we think," and he walked into school with downcast head and a very thoughtful expression indeed on his face. The next afternoon he went, quite alone, to the gipsies' tents, which he had learned were pitched in the retired and gloomy lane leading round to Boydell Manor from the Buncombe side, and when he came back he told such wonderful tales of what he had both seen and heard that a regular *furor* of curiosity was excited amongst those whose faith in the supernatural had been born of or strengthened by the ghostly stories of the past winter. A visit to the tents was not, however, a matter very easy to accomplish by any but Uppers; they lay a good way out of bounds; the only means of access to the lane, from the Kings Beeches side, was by going along the Buncombe road, where there was great risk of meeting masters or other persons who might put unpleasant questions; and finally, a peep in the "mirror of fate" cost at least half-a-crown—a lump sum that Lowers had often considerable trouble to scrape together. Again, there was the very serious risk of being found out; for of course fortune-telling, or listening rather, was a dire offence

against all the Kings Beeches rules, and the gipsies positively refused any more to enter the College grounds. Jerry Townsend, whose weak, if jocular, mind had been greatly impressed with the occurrences we have narrated, and who had besides just now an especial reason for learning what was about to happen, made up his mind that he would have a peep into the magic mirror; but he was afraid to venture by himself, and cast about for a suitable companion. He was afraid that his usual chum, Dick Banks, would scoff at the whole affair and so spoil the effect, and therefore, after much deliberation, he fixed on young Miller, who was an out-and-out believer in everything of the sort.

One bright afternoon—it was, of course, a half-holiday—the two presented themselves at the gipsies' tents, outside the best of which they found the girl Miriam seated, and again staring into vacancy.

“My poor boy!” she said at once to Miller before either of them had addressed her, and speaking in the sweetest and silveriest tones of compassion, “my poor boy, you, of all, should not tempt fate; what you would see would only horrify you!”

“How do you mean?” asked Townsend, getting very red in the face.

“Hist! don't ask her any questions,” was the whispered admonition of the believing Miller.

“Questions must be asked, young sir, and answered too!” said the girl, turning suddenly on the whisperer,

who after that was silent in confusion. Townsend tendered her the necessary half-crown.

"Put up your money! put up your money! what I have to say to you needs no money! Nor shall you see the mirror while you tremble so."

"Tremble! I'm not trembling," denied the boy, who, however, really was very nervous.

"Hold out your hand!" she ordered sternly. He did so.

"Look at your finger ends." He again obeyed her, and at once saw that they really were vibrating.

"I will look," he said determinedly, making a successful effort to steady his nerves.

"My poor boy, don't ask me!" she said in tones of real tenderness; "you know the misery and woe there is at your house!"

"Good gracious! you surely don't know of my mother's illness?"

"Ay, and more, far more, than that: but I must not—I *will not*—tell you. No!" she went on, as though her mind was quite made up; "No, Miriam the gipsy will never bring sorrow and woe before their time. Take back your money, poor boy"—he had dropped the silver in her lap—"take up your money and leave me; you *must* take it." She placed it in his hand, "for I dare not let you see the mirror or speak of the future!"

Townsend was in an ecstasy of fear and excitement. No one that he knew of was aware of his mother's ill-

ness, and he himself had regarded it as a mere temporary matter till the gipsy spoke of "woe and misery" in his home. He got very pale as he stammered out—

"Will she—oh, my goodness, if it should be so! will she—die?" He gasped the last word hoarsely, as it seemed wrenched up from his heart. But Miriam gave no answer; she sank down into the old crouching position, resuming her rigid stare—far, far away it seemed she looked—only that the eyes seemed moist and more dreamy than ever. He repeated his question with increased earnestness and emotion; still she did not answer; a third time he put it, while his heart sank within him.

"Count forty, and watch yon tree," she bade him, pointing to an elm a long way off, at whose stem some men had been hacking and sawing, and were now hauling on a rope attached to its upper portion. Instinctively Townsend commenced to count aloud as one telling the seconds:

"—Thirty-five, thirty-six!" Townsend, when he had got so far, began to have hopes he would reach the forty before anything happened:—"thirty-seven, thirty——"

With a crash that could be plainly heard where they were, the mighty elm toppled and fell to the earth, and the boy started fearfully at the omen, and then turned deadly pale.

"Go!" said Miriam, at once disappearing into the

tent, which she shut up close behind her. In dismay at what had happened, and with a terrible foreboding of evil at his heart, Jerry Townsend made the best of his way home—not exchanging one word with Miller, who was also profoundly impressed by the whole scene.

It could not be expected that such a boy as Townsend was could keep even this awful warning to himself, and in a very few days it was all over the school, reaching even to the ears of Red Weskit, who, as in duty bound, communicated it to the Principal. The very day he did so a telegram arrived at the Beeches with an announcement of the quite sudden death of Mrs. Townsend, and on its becoming known—for the departure of the wretched orphan boy to his motherless home could not be kept secret—a most profound sensation was created all through the school. The Principal, as soon as he heard of it, went over to see Squire Boydell, and that very evening the gipsies were driven out of the neighbourhood, vowing vengeance as they went on all connected with Kings Beeches and Boydell. Miriam was specially violent—the curses she heaped on the head of the Principal being something fearful to listen to, as the men entrusted with the eviction bore ample testimony. Within a month a fire occurred in the Kings Beeches farm-yard (doing an immense amount of damage), for which no cause could be found; it was generally ascribed to the revenge of the gipsies, but as no traces whatever of any of the tribe being in

the county even, could be found, no detection or punishment was the result of the suspicion. Later in the year Squire Boydell suffered a somewhat similar loss, but with that the present record has nothing to do.

CHAPTER IV.

BERTIE RAWLINGS HAS A VISION.

A WARM night in August, and the great hall crammed with all the masters, the students, the servants, and even as many of the farm labourers with their wives and families as could be crowded in. At the far end of this immense room a small space had been marked off, which now contained a table, a few chairs, and was lighted with a long row of gas-burners an inch or two off the ground—the same as were used on the monthly elocution nights, when the boys had to display their declamatory powers. The reason of the assembly was that a certain Professor von Koritz had applied for, and obtained, permission to give his wonderful lecture on mesmerism, with illustrative experiments. The lads were on the tiptoe of expectation; they had all heard a great deal of this supposed wonderful power that one man could exercise over his fellow-beings, but none of them had as yet seen any exhibition of the sort, and were therefore very curious on the subject. Nor indeed had many of the masters had an opportunity for practical investigation into the principles of Mesmer, which were at that time hardly much known in England, and they too displayed almost as much eagerness as did the boys. Von Koritz first gave a very interesting

lecture, in the course of which he sketched the life of the founder of the so-called science, defended the theories Mesmer had put forth, and advocated with great heat and energy their adoption by all sensible men. He then proceeded to illustrate what he had advanced with actual experiments that excited the greatest wonder, not unmingled with undefined fear, amongst the greater portion of the Professor's audience. But, the experiments being all tried on a lad who travelled with the lecturer, a cry of collusion was raised by some who considered the feats displayed were all mere pieces of acting, and not the spontaneous movements of the body, obedient to the will of the operator in a state of artificial trance.

"Will any of de young gentlemen come on de pladform, den?" asked the Professor in the most persuasive tones, as he heard the murmurs of discontent.

"I will!" answered Davie Corbett; and "I will!" "I will!" was taken up and repeated by a dozen voices, all anxious to test in person the truth of the matter. But they reckoned without their host. The Principal, who knew well that the timid and weak-minded could be thrown into a state of coma by any one with sufficient strength of will, positively refused to allow any of the students to be operated on; and he was therefore obliged to take his subjects from some of the servants and the farm labourers. Out of these, then, he selected three or four susceptible young men, placed them in the trance, and then made them perform the

most ridiculous exploits with their bodies—simply by giving them the word of command, or the necessary gesture. The man was very clever indeed at his business, and the feats he performed, or rather made his subjects perform, were really marvellous and the very best of their kind. When he brought his lecture to a close he was warmly applauded by all, and requested by the Principal to repeat it again the following night, and give, if possible, still further information as to the agencies employed in producing the mesmeric sleep. Professor von Koritz, who was off to another part of the country in a few days, had no objection whatever to explain his *modus operandi* to a party of young gentlemen who could do him no possible harm in his business; accordingly, he told, as well as he could, his simple method of fixing the patient's attention on one object until his thoughts attained a certain drowsiness and familiarity with the will of the operator, when the desired results could be more or less obtained according to the degree of susceptibility of the subject. He showed practically *how* he managed the persons who went on his platform; and one of the consequences of his confidence was that all next day the boys were trying mesmeric experiments with one another—the result being in every case the rather laughable one of complete and total failure. Another consequence was more serious, and worse in every sense of the word—the taste for the supernatural was once more excited among the younger and more ignorant classes, and the

old story of the ghostly monk was revived with increased vigour, and with terrible results, as the event proved. A gentle, loving little fellow, named Paul Launay, whom every one of any goodness of nature at the Beeches loved and admired, was lying very ill of scarlatina in the infirmary. In progress of time the fell disease began to give way to the ministrations of Dr. Squills, until the little fellow had so far recovered that there was no longer any necessity for any one to sit up with him at night, as the room he was in was close to the dormitory. He was slumbering peacefully one night all alone in the infirmary, when something startled him and he woke up. He could see nothing, and was about to compose himself to sleep again, when a low, hollow, unearthly groan burst on his astounded ears; involuntarily he looked towards the spot it appeared to come from, and there, under the blue light of the turned-down gas, stood the monk with his fearful white face, his luminous eyes, and the heart-wound dripping with gore! A fearful scream of wild terror broke from the child's lips; in a moment or two—certainly not more—a dozen fellows rushed in from the adjacent dormitory in their night-shirts, and found the poor little invalid in a dead faint—but no traces of the ghost, not even of blood this time, could be found! The Principal was at once informed of what had happened, and for the first time heard the full particulars of what had been going on now for nearly a year. He had heard some rumours before, but it was only now that

any definite information of the matter came to his ears. Launay immediately relapsed into a much worse state than before; he was with the greatest difficulty removed to his own home, and (we may as well tell the plain truth at this stage of our record) in rather less than a year he pined away and died.

Immediately the Principal heard the full facts of the ghost story, he instituted a most close search—up and down, high and low—for any garment or article that could give a clue to the perpetrator of the cruel joke—for joke (in the sense of a brutal practical jest) of course it was held to be. But search as they would, they could not obtain the slightest thread to guide them, and their useless quest only strengthened the opinions of those who believed it was something supernatural.

One day, while the inquiries were being made, young Bertie Rawlings was dozing over a drawing he wished to copy, while sitting up in a little disused attic, whither he had retired to avoid the teasings he was subject to on account of his mopish habits. The afternoon was very warm; Bertie had dined pretty freely; the silence, rarely broken by any one passing at the far end of the corridor, was very pleasant and soothing—so Bertie dropped off to sleep. Then, after a long time, he seemed *to dream that he was awake*; that some one was creeping stealthily along the corridor; that the door was pushed partially open; that a face he knew well, though he could not for the life of him remember its name, cautiously peeped in and started back when

it saw him ; that he was on the point of jumping up and calling to it, when it silently entered the room and began making "passes" at him the same way the mesmeric Professor had done, and that then he went to sleep in reality !

Bertie Rawlings was reported "missing" at supper-time that evening, and, considering the extraordinary *things* that were tolerably common at Kings Beeches just now, no little consternation was evinced when he was looked for in his usual haunts and not found. The master on duty in the supper-room sent word to the Principal (he had, since the infirmary affair, given strict orders that *everything* at all out of the common should be at once reported to him in person), who came down from his chambers and questioned Bertie's best friends as to his usual places of resort. But they had told already all they knew, and were powerless to add further information. The Principal was at first in difficulties how further to proceed, but being a man of prompt resource, and feeling somehow or other that this last matter had some connection with the ghost story, he at last determined to start from that point, so he summoned by name all those who had been more intimately mixed up with that affair, and ordered them into one of the class-rooms. He examined them and cross-examined them afresh—indeed was in the act of doing so, when Tom Miller, who had been up to now in a regular quandary at this fresh mystery, suddenly spoke :—

"If you please, sir, Bertie sometimes goes to draw in one of the attics off the long corridor!"

"Why on earth did you not say so before?" asked the Principal, excessively annoyed. Miller hung his head as he muttered something about not remembering it. Taking the whole party with him—Uppers and Lowers both—the Principal ascended to the place named, where, sure enough, they found Bertie Rawlings fast asleep.

"Rawlings! Rawlings!" the Doctor cried, shaking the sleeper by the shoulder; but he was perfectly unconscious—in a dead trance it seemed—and cold water, brown paper, burnt feathers, *sal volatile*, and all sorts of things had to be used before the seriously alarmed Principal could rouse the boy up. At last he raised his head a little, gave vent to a deep sigh, sneezed, and opened his eyes in a most bewildered manner. Presently he came to himself and was able to speak. Then, bit by bit, in answer to the Doctor's leading questions, he told all about his dream—a story that fully confirmed the idea in the Principal's mind that he was at last on the track of the ghost.

"But can't you remember who it was that mesmerised you?—just think."

"No," said Bertie, looking round with a confused air, "his name is on the tip of my tongue, but I can't get it out."

Banks and Corbett had for a few moments been whispering together, and then they stepped deter-

minedly forward. "If you please, sir," said the latter, "Banks and I were in the music-room" (this was some distance from the house-end of the passage, but in a line with it) "about the time Rawlings must have gone to sleep, and we saw, passing across as if he were going up——"

"Who?—for goodness sake, say *who*!" broke in the Principal impatiently.

"Joe Smithers!"

"Smithers? that's it, sir!" cried Rawlings, "and I remember thinking how odd it was he should have his hair cut so short."

"Cut short! how's that?"

"I know Smithers went to Pitchcot directly after dinner, sir," put in Coxon, "and *did* have his hair cut very short."

"Where is Smithers?"

He had been with the rest in the class-room, but must have slipped on one side on the way upstairs, for he was certainly not then in the attic. Taking Coxon, Banks, Corbett, and Bertie Rawlings with him, the Principal dismissed the others to the play-room, and on reaching his chambers at once caused all the masters to be summoned, and sent Red Weskit off with positive orders to bring Smithers back with him as soon as possible. In five minutes all were assembled, and Joe Smithers, firmly grasped by the wrist by Red Weskit, stood, as pale as death and trembling in every limb, in their midst. In a few stern words the Principal called

on Smithers to confess all (in reality he knew nothing, and was only going on the supposition that Smithers knew all about the ghost), lest he should be forced to send for the constable and give him in charge!

"Constable! in charge!" stammered out the cowardly fellow.

"Yes, in charge, sir! you are a criminal; for all we know, poor Launay may die through your crime, and then you will be indicted for manslaughter."

"Oh! for God's sake let me go,—let me go, I pray you—I entreat you!" He fell on his knees out of the grasp of Peter Westcott, and bent his head on the floor in abject terror.

"Get up, sir!" thundered the Principal, "get up and tell us everything about it, or it will be worse for you."

Then this wretched youth—whose great talents, had they not been marred and misdirected by his insane vanity of being different from (superior to, he called it) other people, would have made him an object of love and respect—told the whole of the ghost story, from the first night when—"for a lark" he said—he had frightened Johnny Wolf, down, through the whole career of cruel practical joking of the worst possible kind, to the fatal occasion when he had brutally, inhumanly, woke up poor little Paul Launay and sent him home to die—a sickening record, that makes us shudder to think of. Of course he had accomplices—the brawny Dawkins, and the impressionable Thompson

amongst Uppers, and little Jack Belton in Lowers—but their guilt, though of such a serious nature as to cause their removal from the College, was not equal to that of the arch-conspirator, who had deliberately initiated and entered on his career of charlatanism from malicious motives alone. He thought these supernatural pretences would give him a *power* he could not otherwise hope to attain; that he would feel and actually be superior to his compeers; and that his vain hopes of being superior to his fellows would thus be fulfilled. He fell into the pit of sin and folly his own hands had dug, and no pity whatever can be felt for one so debased, one so truly criminal as to prey on the weak superstitious fears of those whose minds are not sufficiently strong to resist them.

The details of how he carried out the ghost trick were paltry enough. The rush of cold air, on the first night described, had been done by his accomplices suddenly opening well-greased lattices with strings, and letting in the fierce equinoctial gale that was blowing. The “fading away” in clouds of smoke, and the smell, was easily managed with a little sulphur; the same ingredient imparting the luminous rings round the eyes of which so much was made; while the *something* disturbing sleepers was simply hoarse words, of awful import, muttered in their ears by means of a hollow telescope cane that could be readily withdrawn the moment the victim gave signs of waking. The blood was real blood—of a pig, a sheep, or cow, just as the Pitchcot butcher

happened to be killing; and the "Vigilance Committees," threats of "Public Thrashings," and so forth, were of course all manipulated by the prime mover to withdraw suspicion from himself. The rapping at the partitions; the gas going out (Jack Belton managed that with a wooden key he had made to turn it off at the main); the damped matches; and Corbett's fall over a rapidly withdrawn rope—are all easily comprehensible now that the key-note has been given; and all the more so when it is remembered that in moments of sudden difficulty and danger, real or supposed, the minds even of the boldest are in an excited state, that fails to perceive causes that at another time would be readily patent. But the affair of the gipsies was instigated by a meaner motive. After their first chance visit, and his detection by the girl Miriam (who had heard of the ghost from one of the farm lads, who, in turn, had heard it spoken of when he was working in the Beech Walk), he had actually sought to get money from the old woman by giving her real information regarding the other fellows—it was thus Miriam knew that Jerry Townsend's mother was in consumption, and made a hit-or-miss shot at the end of the disease—and thus it was their prophécies and "fortunes" bore such an air of reality. With this keen taste for science—and especially for the curiosities of science—he had watched Professor von Koritz eagerly, and had picked up far more information on the subject than any one else; so that when the fate of Paul Launay occurred, and his

accomplices were on the very point of giving him up to justice, he saw that the ghost business must come to an immediate end, and it was while seeking a still safer place (under the boarding) to hide the monk's dress, &c., that he had come across Bertie Rawlings, and mesmerised him in his sleepy state, lest the lad should run down and make a noise about seeing him sneak into the attic.

There is no more to tell; he was at once expelled the school, and sent away that very night, and the ghost was seen no more. But even to this day, a mutilated sort of legend hangs round the dormitories in connection with his criminal exploits, and when the autumn equinoctial gales are blowing, little boys sit up and shiver in their beds, as they call to mind the horrible scraps they have heard of the monk with the bleeding heart.

Years after the occurrence narrated above, a prematurely old man wandered into Pitchcot, clad almost in tatters, hungry and forlorn, and bearing with him the few miserable appurtenances of a strolling conjuror. He tried all the lowest inns and beer-houses, but his appearance was so wretched—vicious and dangerous, one landlord called it—that no one would take him in without ready money, and of that he had none. He got up and tried a performance in the village street, but no one threw him a penny, and in despair he wandered down to the College. The lads gathered round to watch his

tricks, which were performed with considerable skill and knowledge, and then he proposed to mesmerise one of the boys. Peter Westcott, who had thought he distantly recognised the man, at once was struck with the peculiar way he began to make the "passes," and in the debauched, worn-out conjuror he found again the too clever boy, Joe Smithers! Without making a fuss, he stopped the performance, sent the boys away, gave the quondam pupil half-a-crown, and sent him about his business, with a warning not to come back again.

That was the last that was ever seen or heard of Joe Smithers.





Story the Eleventh.

“SOFT SAWDER.”

CHAPTER I.

MASTER AND PUPIL.

TIME, two P.M.; the school just broken up from dinner, and quite a mob of lads swarming into the playground for their half-holiday. Presently, Dr. Faldoon, the Principal, a gentleman of high attainments, and very much liked by most of the scholars, comes strolling up to the Beech Walk, which is a favourite resort of his; for he is very fond of the society of those who are under his immediate control and guidance, losing no opportunity of being with them in their moments of leisure, and, in spite of his naturally strong, firm disposition, giving way in no few instances to their solicitations when judiciously preferred. In fact, the Doctor is a strange

mixture of great talent and simplicity; of strength of character and of weakness; of great kindness, and yet of a (sometimes) sternness that would be quite incomprehensible unless examined by the light of his earlier career. A close student, in his earlier days he had shrunk from all interruption; at the University he had pursued the same plan of life; and he emerged thence, years after he had taken a fellowship, to find that he knew next to nothing of men or of real life, while as to the manners and customs and habits of thought and of action of boys, they were to him as a sealed book. But he thoroughly enjoyed the freshness and novelty of the ideas awakened in his mind by contemplating those youthful exuberances to which he had hitherto been a stranger, and hence it was that the Beech Walk so constantly resounded to his footsteps in the play-hours.

A cluster of boys came thronging round him with respectful and affectionate greetings. For all he had a pleasant smile, a kindly word, an anxious inquiry on some point of personal interest, or a bit of information that had been asked for beforehand, and subsequently dug out from the Doctor's library or his evening newspaper reading. Briskly he walked to and fro, with some dozen lads on either side of him, all keeping up a constant chatter-chatter of question, answer, or remark, that would have been confusing had they been of any great importance.

"Where is your brother, John?" Dr. Faldoon asked

of a sturdily built boy of sixteen or so, who to an English frame and build added a complexion of a slightly tawny hue—"a touch of the tar-brush," as it was somewhat cruelly expressed at Kings Beeches—that proved a slight admixture of Asiatic blood.

John Soldane smiled rather peculiarly as he answered: "He's indoors, sir; got an imposition, I think, to do for Mr. Matthews."

"Ah! that's bad—very bad!—what has he been doing now?"

"Nothing, sir."

"That's what he's usually punished for, isn't it, John?" queried the Principal, with a funny twinkling smile.

Everybody laughed; they well knew Andrew Soldane's proclivity for giving the answer "Nothing, sir," when asked the reason for being under a temporary cloud; and they thoroughly enjoyed the younger brother's unconscious adoption of the same reply. Presently the culprit Andrew was seen making his way up from the school-house, coming along with the peculiar sort of half side-walk natural to him—some fellows called it a shambling gait, while others used a harsher term; but doubtless all that arose from the fact of the elder brother being a great favourite with Dr. Faldoon, and the consequent jealousy. Andrew Soldane was a somewhat singular-looking boy, or hobble-de-hoy, rather; he was some two years older than his brother, and ranked high amongst the Uppers, and much

less English-like in appearance than John. His frame was slight, carrying but little flesh, and moving rather with the sinuosity of the eel than the sturdiness of a strongly backboned being. His face was very sallow, strongly marked in its thin lines, lit up with eyes intense in their blackness, and surmounted by lank hair of the same pitch-dark hue. He had a most engaging smile, as a rule—a smile that expressed affection, devotion, and gentleness of a winning nature; but times were not wanting, as was well known at the Beeches, when that smile turned to gall and bitterness, while intense passion and hatred distorted the whole countenance into something very unpleasant to behold. Not often was it so, mind you; but when the foreign blood was *really* up, it seemed beyond all control, and Andrew Soldane became, in the language of the school, a “dangerous customer.” But now as he came up to the Doctor’s party, his face expressed nothing but “sweetness and light,” while his mouth bore a comical smile of deprecation in regard to the fault for which he had been punished, mingled with a pleading glance that went straight to the Principal’s heart. It was not etiquette for the latter to speak to him before others of an imposition inflicted by another master, but he received Andrew with a look that had little of fault-finding in it, and spoke to him as kindly as he always did. One by one the other fellows dropped away to their several sports and occupations—they knew all talk of a general nature was at an end when “the Doctor’s

suck" (for by that hateful name was the elder Soldane known) joined the company—and very soon the Beech Walk contained only the master and the pupil.

"Well, Andrew, in hot water again?"

"Really and truly nothing this time, sir," answered Soldane, while his smile was more winning than ever, with just a *soupsçon* of roguishness to give it a pleasant piquancy. "Mr. Matthews only found me——"

"Now, Andrew, you know I will not in any way interfere. I have no doubt whatever you were wrong——"

"Well, but, Doctor, just listen to me." He saw the other's face relenting under the fascination of his pleading, and went on more boldly, "I had finished all my work—more than finished it—and was just looking over my list of new books for the library" (Soldane was the custodian of Upper boys' book-room) "to submit to you, when Mr. Matthews came up, said I had no right to do so in study time, and gave me this imposition. I am sure there was nothing in that. But I have done the half of it already——"

"And you want me to get you off the other, eh?"

"I have so little time, Doctor, to look to the books," skilfully put in the other, as he gazed up earnestly in the Principal's face.

"Well, well, it does seem a little hard, and I'll just mention the matter to Mr. Matthews" (Soldane looked jubilant and grateful; he knew now that he had got

off a task that he hated); but have you the list of new books ready for me?"

"Yes, sir, quite ready;" and the librarian produced the document, handing it to the other with a rather dubious air, for it contained no few works of "life" that were certainly open to many objections considering the juvenile hands into which they were to pass. The Doctor put on his glasses to scan the list more thoroughly; but he was such a simple-minded man in this matter that he really was quite incompetent to tell the good from the bad as far as fiction for boys went, and his objections to some of the titles and some of the authors were removed without much difficulty by the precocious youngster, whose views as to the aforesaid "life" were far in advance of his years. Against one or two volumes the Doctor (quite in ignorance on the subject) thought it wise to make a firm stand, but it is not too much to say that their places on the list were at once taken up by others of a far worse type—to the great delight of Soldane, who had refrained from previously inserting the latter lest they should be thought *too bad*. When that job was concluded, the "suck" preferred a request for an afternoon's leave of absence for himself and brother to go fishing on the next half-holiday, and readily received the desired permission. He then took himself off to write to London for the books that had been "passed," and when that was accomplished he felt perfectly satisfied with himself for having done a good day's work, and for having hood-

winked the Doctor once more in every matter he had proposed to him.

When the promised half-holiday came round, the two brothers Soldane went off in high glee to fish a portion of the Pitch that was free ; but after enjoying the sport for a very short time indeed, Andrew, who hated outdoor amusements, declared he was tired, and telling his brother John to meet him at the King's Rest at half-past six precisely, went off into Pitchcot, under cover of the excuse that he was going to practise the violin with a certain Jem Scalpel, the very scampish pupil of old Dr. Squills. Now, playing the violin is doubtless a very estimable amusement, and one not at all to be cried down ; but when the practising necessitates the adjournment, after half an hour or less, to the private parlour of a not very reputable public-house known as The Whistling Oyster, it becomes doubtful if the occupation can be recommended to any lad of at all gentlemanly tastes and habits. Nevertheless Andrew Soldane did so go—not only without the slightest pressure, but at his own earnest request—with Scalpel, and there they met two low fellows of the village, dissipated idle sons of two petty tradesmen, with whom they seemed already quite familiar, and the four commenced, with a pack of greasy cards, to play a game that I regret to say the same four had often before played together—to wit, Blind Hookey ! The Soldanes were very well off—too well off—their father, a retired Calcutta merchant, living on some considerable landed pro-

perty he had purchased in Cornwall, having a habit of supplying them with secret funds to an extent that was foolish as well as cruel. At the same time, if he had had the least idea that most of it was spent in pot-house gambling (John got very little indeed of it, nor did his more manly and honest tastes require it) he would have been in what is popularly termed a "howling rage;" would have stopped the supplies at once; and would have punished Master Andrew in a way he little dreamed of. However that might be, Jem Scalpel and his two disreputable friends made a very nice little bit of pocket-money between them out of Andrew Soldane and Blind Hookey, and on this occasion the wilful and foolish boy rose to meet his brother at the King's Rest, not alone completely cleared out of ready money, but leaving behind him sundry "manly" scraps of paper pledging him to pay these fellows, who had cheated him, sundry amounts that added up to a very considerable sum.

He retired home with John (who knew nothing whatever of these long-continued gambling meetings) in very considerable tribulation of mind—in a "regular fix" as to ways and means to be adopted for clearing off his "debts of honour," as he grandiloquently termed his liabilities to these fellows, who were little, if anything, better than swindlers. "What *shall* I do?" was the question forcing itself on his mind every second of that long dreary evening, and "what shall I do?" pursued him in mocking accents when he retired to bed

and vainly courted sleep. Only that very week he had received a very large secret remittance from his father, every penny of which he had just lost at The Whistling Oyster, and therefore he knew it would be utterly useless to apply for more for a considerable time. Knowledge of "life" (gathered from such-like books as those he had that very day obtained the consent of Dr. Faldoon to purchase) said, "You're a gentleman, and *must* first pay your 'debts of honour!'" His empty purse retorted, "But I have not the means, nor any immediate prospect of them!" and then "What shall I do? what *shall* I do?" kept the invisible ball of trouble rolling till Andrew Soldane's brain was quite in a maze. At length a happy thought came to his relief: he had "expectations," he had a wealthy father, but stern although he was kind. Andrew was the eldest son—surely out of these three facts he could elicit a plan of comfort. With some cogitation he succeeded in doing so, and then he turned round on his pillow to enjoy the sound sleep that is only granted to two very different classes—the just, and those utterly without conscience.

CHAPTER II.

"THE PHILISTINES ARE UPON US !"

"WHERE are you off to, Andrew?" asked John the next morning, when the elder brother had matured his plan of action and was making as fast as he could up the lawn in the Pitchcot direction. The latter did not know that his brother was behind a beech clump, mending some fishing-tackle, or he would have taken a different route. He turned sharply round, answering with considerable tartness—

"What's that to you? Can't I go about without you dogging me?"

"I'm not dogging you—and I am sure I don't care a farthing."

"Then ask no questions, and you'll hear no lies," was the retort; but on second thoughts he deemed it best not to excite any suspicions in his brother's mind by making mysteries, so he turned back with his usual gentle smile, saying:—

"Forgive me, old boy! I'm out of sorts; I lost my watch locket yesterday and I've got leave to go to Jem Scalpel's to see if he's got it."

"Oh, all right," answered the other, quite satisfied with the false tale, "but are you sure you did not lose it when fishing?"

"Certain; I had it at Squill's I know," and he rapidly resumed his journey. A few minutes found him in the back parlour of The Whistling Oyster, where he boldly called for a glass of ale, and then (more timidly) requested to see the landlord. Mr. William Swiper, familiarly called Old Billy Swipes, was not very long in putting in an appearance, and asking, in his hoarse asthmatical half-whisper, "What might Muster Soldane want?"

Andrew moved a counter proposition by asking Swipes what he would drink; ordering the necessary hot rum-and-water with the *blasé* air of a complete man of the world—an air, be it remarked, which he was quite an adept at assuming when away by himself from the Beeches.

"Has that warmed the cockles of your heart, Swipes, eh?" he gaily asked when his companion had swallowed down the fiery compound.

"It's the throat, Muster Soldane, the throat I thinks; the hot rum, you see, does it a power of good," was the answer, while Swipes scanned his entertainer carefully, as if to divine what was wanted of him.

"Pleasure first, business afterwards, is my motto, Swipes; so now for business. You know I lost a lot of money here yesterday?"

"Know you lost a lot of money here, Muster Soldane? Lord bless you, no!" was the reply, in a voice of the utmost (assumed) astonishment. "Why, what could have put that idee into the young gemman's head?"

Andrew was rather taken aback at this, quite forgetting, at the instant, that the landlord of a public-house was *bound not to know of gambling going on in his premises.*

"Oh, stuff, Swipes ! you must know it. However, whether you do or not does not matter—I tell you now, and that's quite enough."

"Well, you du astonish me—you du ! Who did you lose it to ? "

"Young Scalpel, and those other two cads of his lot. Plenty yesterday, and plenty before. In fact I'm run out dry, and I have come to you for a loan—there ! " was the quick answer, the words being poured out like water, as one does who wants to get out his meaning at once.

"Well, you du astonish me, you du ! " was again the landlord's remark. Of course he knew all about the gambling, and, almost equally of course, he knew what Andrew came for that morning—it being pretty well known to Jem Scalpel and all his kidney that Billy Swipes was always ready to "do" a bill for a man, provided he felt pretty sure of payment.

"Oh, bother your astonishment !" interjected Andrew ; "I know you do that sort of thing, and I know also that I am a better, a sounder, and a bigger fish than usually tumbles into your net. You just stir yourself to answer me, as I have to be back at the Beeches in a quarter of an hour."

Thus adjured, old Billy Swipes, after many more

solemn declarations of extreme astonishment coupled with protestations that he had no "ready," never had had any, and never expected to get any, consented to think over the matter, provided Andrew Soldane would show him all his father's letters that had contained remittances for the last year, as a proof of the sums he was likely to have towards paying off any loan Swipes might advance. Andrew readily consented to this, thinking himself very fortunate that he had always been in the habit of preserving his correspondence, and after more beer and more rum respectively, he took his departure, to return the same afternoon with Mr. Soldane's foolish letters, that were now bearing their fruit in leading his son into that very pit which they were intended to keep him from. They proved perfectly satisfactory to old Swipes; so much so, indeed, that he readily advanced his client (at a fearful rate of interest certainly) as much money as sufficed not only to clear all his liabilities, but also to leave a good sum in hand for further gambling transactions whenever opportunity offered. Nor did old Billy run the smallest possible risk in doing so; for he knew perfectly well that his self-offered victim *dared not* refuse to pay him (though legally, of course, the transaction was null and void), as any hesitation in doing so would lead to exposure to his father, whose letters bore ample evidence that he would stand no nonsense in that way from the son whom he was yet so injudiciously training up in habits of deception by granting him these sums of

money unknown to his masters. All this was kept a dead secret from John Soldane, whose nature was quite unsuspicious, as well as from Jem Scalpel and the others, whose tell-tale tongues Billy Swipes justly dreaded in transactions of such a delicate nature.

"Andrew, my boy, what is it makes you so dull and gloomy of late?" asked Dr. Faldoon of his favourite some months after the business just recorded. It was winter-time, and that perhaps accounted for the cruel shiver, as of ague, that passed all over Soldane's frame before he could reply (still with the old pleading fascinating smile)—

"Nothing, sir!"

"Nothing, again, Andrew; it is always 'nothing' with you!"

The other smiled at the old joke, but he looked unwell and unhappy as he again shuddered, and said he thought "it must be the weather."

"Hum—the weather is cold certainly, but it is not dull—rather brisk and bracing than otherwise; it can hardly be that, Andrew. Tell me, is there anything on your mind?" The good face of the Doctor absolutely shone with kindness and sympathy as he asked the question with all the anxiety of a father. It was on the tip of Soldane's tongue to cry out for pardon, and confess all; it was bursting from his heart to fall down and wail for pity and forgiveness; it was the grace of God powerfully stirring his seared conscience to repentance and contrition for the past; but the

Tempter prevailed, all the abominable trash of "life" and devilish "manliness," and false "honour," that the lad had been garbaging on came back with a black rush over his soul; the "better moment" went by unheeded; the "good angel" passed on his way with the rejected grace, and Andrew Soldane, with a great effort, shut down all better, holier thoughts, forced up his usual smile, and again replied, "Nothing, sir!"

"Nothing be it, then," said the doctor, somewhat disconcerted at the reticence of his pupil, and soon the two parted with mutual distrust—the Principal feeling that there was something not quite right which was being concealed from him; and Soldane, fearing that his master had his suspicions of something wrong, and would push them to a discovery that might prove fatal. In truth, Andrew was in the very lowest spirits, and with ample reason. The first loan from old Billy Swipes had led to another, another, and yet another, all of which were spent in gambling, while no payments save those for interest alone had been made, and Billy began to hint that the amount was getting rather larger than he liked, and that he should be glad to have some of the earlier sums wiped off before doing any further business. This last intimation reached Andrew Soldane's hands in the form of a horribly spelled and scrawled epistle, one day when he was just starting for The Whistling Oyster, with a view to raising further funds; so, giving the sharp urchin who had smuggled it into his hands unseen a few coppers

for his trouble, he dismissed him with word that he would take the answer himself, and strolled leisurely down to the village, pondering deeply as he went. The more he pondered, the less he could see his way out of the awful mess his criminal foolishness had brought him into; but instead of sorrowing and repenting for the latter, he only cursed it as "ill-luck," and cursed himself for not having better employed the talents he possessed for wheedling and deceiving good people into extricating him from his trouble without shame and disgrace. So in sheer despair he went down to The Whistling Oyster, determined to do any mortal thing sooner than have an exposure before the people at Kings Beeches, but, above all, before his father, whose rage he knew to be boundless when strong passion possessed him. For a full hour he was closeted with old Billy Swipes; then stamped paper was sent for; then a disreputable attorney (always on the point of being struck off the Rolls) was called in; witnesses of the dullest comprehensions were readily procured; and when at length Andrew Soldane left the public-house his face was deadly pale, a clammy moisture stood on his brow, and he trembled all over. Yet his mind felt somewhat easier; the immediate strain was removed; and though there would be days and days of anxiety before he could hear from Billy Swipes that all was settled, he really was more comfortable and composed than before. Hours merged into days, days into weeks, and still Swipes had no news for him! "What

could be the matter?" Swipes did not know, except that "them 'ere law fellows in London took a plaguey long time messing about any little matter;" and it was in those days that the last words with the Doctor, as recorded above, took place.

"You're wanted, Master Soldane," said Peter Westcott gravely, laying his hand on Andrew's shoulder one study time. The latter bounded from his seat, turned a sallow white, and shook as if in a fit while he gasped out:

"W—wanted? what for, Peter?" But Peter either would not or could not give him any further information except that he was wanted alone—Master John was not to come on any account—in the parlour. And without more ado he took the lad by the arm and marched him off, as he was evidently unable to go alone. Peter flung the door open, disclosing within the forms of Mr. Soldane, perfectly black with suppressed passion, and of Dr. Faldoon, who appeared uncontrollably agitated. I shall not attempt to describe the scene that ensued, or the language, violent in the extreme, that the father used—Red Weskit, who was present all the time, described both as horrible—but will content myself with telling you that the wretched Andrew Soldane had given Billy Swipes a *post obit*, or bill due only *when his father was dead*, and some one in London, into whose hands the scoundrelly document had fallen, had wisely and kindly communicated the

fact to Mr. Soldane, and thus the *émeute* had arisen. Fiercely did the father denounce his cruel-hearted son; fiercely did he denounce the blindness of Dr. Faldoon (for he had employed detectives to find out all about the previous gambling and money transactions), that did not perceive what was going on under his very nose, but actually encouraged Andrew by his weak kindness towards him, and his permission for the purchase of books of a most injurious character; and fiercely did he denounce that old reprobate, Billy Swipes, who, I am very happy to say, never got one penny of his money returned, as of course all his transactions with a minor were quite illegal.

In due time the storm was over; Andrew was taken away at once by his father, and Kings Beeches knew him no more. After a short time John also begged to be removed, as he could not bear the place after the shame of his brother; and a brief time after that again, Dr. Faldoon, whose remorse was cruel and bitter to a degree for his share in innocently encouraging Andrew in his evil ways and falling a victim to his wheedling manner, resigned his office and retired once more into that private life from which he should never have emerged.

The sequel of Andrew Soldane's story is easily told. After a long and severe drilling at home, he was sent to Oxford, where he managed to go utterly to the dogs in a very short time; was disinherited,

and turned adrift by his father; and now picks up a precarious subsistence as a sort of hanger-on and flatterer of silly young men just entering the world, who supply him with money and necessaries of life in return for services that would demean a pariah. Gambling helps him a little, and when things get very dark with him indeed, he is usually rescued by his brother John, who cannot, however, give him any fixed allowance whatever, for the reason that when paid it is that very day squandered, and does the recipient harm instead of good. He is, in fact, a thorough blackguard, and no one with any knowledge of his antecedents will have anything whatever to say to him. Let us drop the curtain on a spectacle that can only sadden where it does not horrify.





Story the Twelfth.

HORACE SALTER'S ADVENTURE.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNACCOUNTABLE DISAPPEARANCE.

THERE was a custom among the seniors in Upper boys at Kings Beeches that differed perhaps in detail from any institution of a similar nature in other proprietary colleges. I allude to the method of disposing of that soft substance on the upper lip and cheeks, denoting an approach to puberty, which boys are apt to call moustache and whiskers, while men, as well as sarcastic young ladies, name it "down." At the Beeches, those who, by constant furtive scraping of their faces with exquisitely sharpened penknives, had at last managed to produce something of this downy nature really visible to the naked eye, were permitted to sit up one

night in the week to participate in that enjoyment and honour of coming manhood—real shaving, with all the paraphernalia of razors, soft-soap, strops, brushes, &c. That this permission was greatly coveted by the Uppers was very patent from the fact that out of every twenty who applied for the necessary leave, only one obtained it; the disappointed nineteen setting to work with renewed vigour to scrape and tear at their unhappy cheeks, to urge on nature with a view to further early applications. For this shaving was very jolly. The few happy ones went down to the large play-room as soon as all the rest of the school had retired, made up a glowing fire, drew the benches and chairs close round, and enjoyed a delightful gossip over things in general and particular until the kettle for hot water began to sing merrily under the influence of the cheerful blaze. Slowly and very elaborately was the whole process undergone; deep and serious were the consultations over the various “stubbles.” Jones’s was declared to be a nonentity; Brown’s was considered to be coming on rather favourably; while, mayhap, Robinson was laughed at for the peculiarly patchy nature of his face-produce. Then coats and waistcoats were thrown off, the hot water dealt out, looking-glasses hung on small nails in the wall, and the lather laid on with more elaboration than a man with a beard strong enough to stuff a sofa pillow would have given to the operation. Razors were stropped, and the work of the night carefully and methodically

set about, with a gravity and reverence that all the signors of Venice could not equal. The cautious, steady old hands shaved clean and drew no blood; young beginners hacked pieces out of their chins until their towels presented a fearful appearance; while those unhappy beings (and they were numerous as a rule) who suffered from the extuberancies so common to growing youths, were in agonies of uncertainty as they dodged their tormentors through the concealing soap-suds. When all were done, a glorious warm wash wound up the proceedings, and, one by one, the party dispersed and went upstairs to bed, with the consoling feeling that no one could now deny their actual manhood.

At the time the present record commences, there were only a very few on the shaving list, and as they were mostly very juvenile, sleep more readily overcame them, and the shaving *séances* were much earlier over than had been usual in other days. An exception was Horace Salter; though rather younger than most of them, he was owner of a much stronger beard-growth than any of his comrades, and was besides very fond of a long quiet read by the fire after all had disappeared, and Kings Beeches was hushed in sleep. Horace was a fellow of pronounced character. He was firmness itself in all that he held to be right and good; he had been in his earlier years at the Beeches exposed to immense and cruel ridicule on account of bodily infirmity (long since grown out of), and had sustained and

“lived it down” with the heroism and constancy of a martyr; then came a period when peculiar and strong temptations to evil had been thrown in his way, owing to the bad tone of a class he had risen into, but he steadfastly resisted them all after a little natural wavering, and now it was acknowledged that his was the better part; he made no affectation whatever of being better than his neighbours—rather the reverse, indeed—and yet he had unconsciously become the leader of a body whose good example produced much real benefit amongst the scholars; his ideas of honour were true, faithful, and brave; his modesty in every action of school life was proverbial, for he *really* believed himself vastly inferior to fellows not fit to tie his shoe-lace; and his courage was of that type which Macbeth falsely claimed for himself:—

“I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none!”

In physical qualifications Horace Salter was rather deficient: in no game or sport did he excel, in very few was he above the average, while in most he was inferior to lads much younger than himself. Nor could this well be accounted for; he was rather stronger than his compeers; he was quite as active; and the will to make the best use of *all* his natural gifts, corporeal as well as mental, was most decidedly not wanting—and yet he was in these things very backward, a fact that pained him no little. With the Principal and most of the masters his character stood so high that he was

allowed to do almost anything he liked ; but there were not wanting a few who thought they detected in Horace the germs of spiritual pride, and those not unfrequently shook their heads as they prophesied the downfall of the school idol, from the evil effects of a too great liberty of action.

I have said above that his beard was strongish ; well, as a matter of course (which no doubt all my readers are well aware of), the shaving nights made it wax yet more bristly and manly, so that in process of time it became essential for the due cleanliness of Salter's appearance, that he should shave twice a week instead of once. He preferred such a request, and it was immediately granted, with the further indulgence that he might select his own nights for his tonsorial operations—a boon which he eagerly grasped at for a special reason, as well as because it gave him more opportunity for private reading by the warm quiet of the play-room fire in the stillness of the night.

“Going to shave again to-night, Horace ?” asked Mr. Eldred, a junior master, who was one of those few who had no very great faith in my hero, one evening when he was turning down the gas in the great school-room after the boys had trooped up to bed.

“Yes, sir ; I have permission, you know.”

“I am quite aware of that ; only it struck me that you hardly required to shave to-night.”

Horace passed his hand down his cheeks and across

his chin meditatively, replying as he did so, in a quiet, respectful tone :—

“I think I do, sir; but if you have the least objection, I will go to bed at once.”

“Oh, not at all, Horace; not at all!” was the reply; for Mr. Eldred did not feel quite comfortable at the idea of interfering with any permission given by his superiors, and had indeed spoken to Horace as much through want of something to say as from any other reason. So he bade Salter “good night,” and retired to masters’ side rather mentally discomfited as he locked the only door of communication behind him.

An hour afterwards Ben Potter, an Upper, who had obtained leave to sit up that evening in the library for the purpose of completing an essay he was engaged on, passed through the large play-room on his way to bed in Grecians’ Grove, and found Salter sitting snugly by the fire in an arm-chair, with his legs reposing on another, reading a book.

“Done shaving, Horry?” he asked, while yawning with fatigue.

“Oh, some time ago; just finishing this before I turn in.”

“Well, good night.”

“Good night,” answered Horace as the other disappeared, and he resumed his studies.

The next morning, when the Uppers were mustered, Horace Salter did not answer to his name. It was not

called a second time, as he was supposed to be snug upstairs in bed, having over-slept himself, or else taking a rest after his last night's study—neither of which luxuries were at all objected to in his case. Nor did he put in an appearance at breakfast-time; but his absence excited little comment except from Mr. Eldred, who was heard to mutter an opinion as to the "natural and bad results of a mere boy being allowed to sit up half the night"—a remark that lost much of its force on account of the speaker being himself not so very many years older than the "mere boy" he alluded to. But when noon came and brought with it a very celebrated German chemist, who was at that time engaged in giving lectures on his science at the Beeches, Horace Salter's absence came at once into prominent notice on account of his being an eager student in that branch, and one of the keenest questioners the Professor had to encounter.

"Where den is de yong tchentleman?" asked Herr Rheimann when some one had told him that Salter was not present; and "where *can* he be?" was eagerly asked from one to another, as an uneasy feeling stole round the chemistry room that "something had happened." The boys stared at one another very peculiarly. There was a sort of sensation of mystery and general discomfort floating round the apartment; one or two laid their heads together in whispering confabulation; and Herr Rheimann poked his ponderous spectacles back on his forehead (an operation he always

resorted to when he wanted *really* to see clearly) and gazed in amazement on his class.

“Has anyvon looked in de bedrooms?” he asked. Strange to say, no one had; and with many a smile and laugh at their uneasiness over a fellow who was probably snug between the blankets, Ben Potter ran off to Grecians’ Grove to rouse the sluggard, and at the same time to satisfy the minds of his class-fellows. In two minutes he returned, pale, agitated, and catching his breath in his excitement.

“He’s not there! The room looks just as it did yesterday morning, and the bed has not been slept in!”

The whole class started to their feet. “What could have happened?” “Should tell the Principal at once!” “By Jove, he’s bolted!” (this from the inevitable funny boy) and a whole torrent of exclamations filled the room.

“You all sit down, yong tchentlemons,” commanded Herr Rheimann in a tone that was not to be mistaken, “you sit all down, and look ofer de lectures in de books; I go to de Principal!” And suiting the action to the word, he rolled his burly form out of the door and made for masters’ side. But if the Professor thought his class were all going to wait patiently for his return, he was very much mistaken. The uneasy feeling had returned with tenfold vigour, in fact consternation would be the more apt expression to use; and, one by one, the Uppers melted from the room, like

snow, till all the benches were deserted. Many of them ran up to view Horace Salter's room, as though some explanation would be afforded by the simple process of staring at an empty chamber and an unused bed; some quietly made their way to masters' side, to confer with such of the Professors as would condescend to hear them; a group gathered round Red Weskit's den, in hopes that Peter could and would give them any scraps of intelligence regarding the mysterious disappearance; while a goodly number took upon themselves the functions of kings and prophets by disseminating the news amongst the Lowers, coupled with most fearful forecastings as to the probable fate of their missing comrade.

The Principal, Dr. Hammond, listened to Herr Rheimann's confused story with the utmost astonishment. At first he believed that the Uppers had been playing a practical joke at the Professor's expense; but when the latter took him up to Grecians' Grove to show him the empty orderly room, and the unslept-on bed, Dr. Hammond became convinced that there was something seriously wrong, and hastily summoning the more experienced masters, a sort of council was held to debate on the strange affair.

Mr. Eldred was called in, and spoke to what had passed between him and Horace the previous night, adding to the story such little spiteful touches as either proved a natural bad feeling towards the lad, or an ignorance of simple cause and effect that was nearly as criminal.

Inquiry was then closely made as to whether any one had seen Horace later, and Ben Potter was called on to narrate all he knew.

“Was there any difference from Salter's usual manner?—did he seem at all excited?” questioned the Principal.

Potter could not say that he saw anything out of the common; certainly Horace was not excited; and, just as certainly, there was no change from his usual conduct or method of speaking—that was all he knew; and after giving the exact time—11.30 P.M.—when he had last spoken to the missing one, he was sent about his business. Dozens of idle suggestions were made: perhaps Salter had a fit, and had turned into some empty room not his own; perhaps he had been taken ill and wandered into the grounds for fresh air, and been unable to get back again; perhaps (but this was very timidly put) he was an arrant impostor, who had got out of bounds for illicit purposes and could not get back again—any of these, or others that came within the broadest possibility of reality, were eagerly discussed without anything at all satisfactory turning up.

Then, as the only plan to be adopted, the Principal ordered a thorough and complete search of the whole rambling old premises from top to bottom—a search that occupied some hours and ended in nothing, no trace or clue whatever appearing. Horace's hat and boots were found undisturbed in their proper places; every article he was known to have had was just where it ought to

have been ; nothing whatever of his was missing except what he carried on his back ; and on his desk being forced open, his money, papers, and other property were all found intact. Then the local police were communicated with, and they had another grand hunt all over the place, with precisely the same result—nil ; they questioned the masters, the boys, the servants—even old Red Weskit himself—without learning any new facts ; and as the outcome of all their labours, they informed Dr. Hammond that it was their private and deliberate opinion that the boy had some secret reason for leaving the Beeches, and had run away. Footsteps, or such like traces, were not to be hoped for, as a heavy storm of rain had effectually washed all such out by daybreak ; and they explained the fact of neither hats nor boots having been taken as a mere attempt to throw dust in the eyes of those who would seek after Salter. Outside the yard that led past the wash-house, they certainly found a red clay pipe of foreign manufacture ; but as there was a public path on the spot, and a band of jugglers on their way to a neighbouring fair had been known to pass that way the previous day, little notice was taken of it, and the inspector readily gave the pipe to Ben Potter, who expressed a desire to keep it as a relic. Out of all this there was very little consolation to be got, but Dr. Hammond was a man accustomed to confront and fight obstacles, and in this case he set to work with hundredfold vigour. He had Pitchcot and all the villages round thoroughly examined,

with a view of learning if any one answering to Salter's description had been seen ; Buncombe and other towns were similarly treated ; the rivers and ponds were dragged ; large rewards were offered jointly by the College authorities and the distracted parents, who had come down to the Beeches on the first intimation of the disaster ; every possible effort was made to hunt up the missing youth ; but all were useless, and a month after the occurrence the mystery was rather a greater than a lesser mystery than before.

That Horace Salter had disappeared was the only fact really to be got at—the how, the why, and the wherefore were inscrutable mysteries ; and as the Lower boys went to bed of nights, they shuddered and trembled at every shadow, at every slightest sound, huddling together for protection like sheep, and scarce daring to sleep, so great was their nameless dread.

CHAPTER II.

HOW IT CAME TO PASS.

WHEN Horace Salter told Ben Potter, on the night of his disappearance, that he was just finishing his book before he turned in, he really meant what he said. It was half-past eleven o'clock ; the fire was waning low ; a natural sleepiness was beginning to display itself ; and bed was evidently the most appropriate place for Horry. Yet somehow he did not like to go. There were many things to occupy his mind when he had reached the *finis* that brought his volume to a close, and he leaned dreamily over the fire to attempt the somewhat difficult process at that sleepy hour of "thinking them out." The fire began to burn very low before he had settled to his own satisfaction some matters of personal interest that had been recently rather disturbing his mind, and he was just on the point of giving the dulling coal a final poke preparatory to yawning off to bed, when a slight noise in the far corner of the room disturbed him. He started to his feet, and peered in the direction of the sound with the greatest earnestness ; but there was nothing to be seen but the immense box filled up with coal occupying the nook of the room between the southernmost window and a door leading out through a wash-house into some other offices

that opened on the yard and public path before mentioned. He flung a cinder, with a smile, at the place whence the noise had proceeded, and laughed to see a large grey rat bounce out and scuttle away to a hole under the staircase leading to Grecians' Grove, whither Ben Potter had disappeared.

But the incident had turned Horace's thoughts in a new direction; and as he stood warming his back at the fire—he had lowered the gas to a blue light, as he fully intended to be off upstairs directly—he involuntarily began to ponder on one or two circumstances that had recently occurred in the school. There was a thief about. Of that no one had the slightest doubt whatever; boxes had been forced open by a skilled hand; the locks of desks had yielded to master-keys and given up their contents; purses had disappeared from places that were regarded as those of the most absolute security—mostly, it had been remarked, on the nights of half-play days, when the distribution of pocket-money took place; and, strangest of all, only those desks, boxes, &c., were touched wherein the most money or greatest valuables were generally known to lie, the receptacles of the poorer lads, or those who were in the habit of squandering all their week's allowance in one day, being invariably left untouched. Therefore, it was justly argued that this audacious thief must be one of themselves, as no one else could possibly tell wherein to find the greatest sums of money or the best articles to

plunder; and it was further a matter of little doubt that he must be an Upper, from the strength and skill necessary to force the chests and pick the locks that had been violated. Horace had taken this state of things very much to heart; it distressed him beyond measure to think that any Christian gentleman—such as he believed and *knew* he lived in close familiar daily intercourse with—should have fallen so low as to give way to these criminal practices; it pained him to the heart to feel vague suspicions of this one or that—suspicions that *would* rise without the slightest reason, and that took him strong efforts to repress; it made him very nervous and uncomfortable to fancy that like vague suspicions probably rested on himself in the minds of others; and—such was the sensitiveness of his nature—for some time past these unpleasant thoughts had had such an effect on him as to undoubtedly impair his health. For instance, he could not sleep well at nights, considering over them; and that was partly the reason why he had put forth a plea for a second shaving in the week, for he found that sitting up late made him sufficiently tired to secure for the remainder of the night sound refreshing slumber. But he had another reason—he had, after much cogitation, come to the conclusion that it would not take any very great effort of police genius to detect this bold thief, and he had resolved that he would himself watch, as well as devote all his energies in every other practical way to the discovery of the culprit if possible in the

act, when he would march him before the Principal (whatever hour of the night or morning it might be), to be summarily dealt with, and thus remove the shame now resting on Kings Beeches as a place of harbourage for thieves. It was partly on this account that he had so gladly hailed the permission granted him to choose his own two nights for shaving purposes—a permission he rather mysteriously availed himself of by sometimes taking two consecutive evenings, sometimes selecting those as far apart as possible, and sometimes even running two weeks' allowance into one. But his watchings had led to no results; perhaps he was watched himself by the thief or thieves; the petty robberies went on pretty much as usual, and Horace Salter was commencing to despair of doing anything in the detective line. But to-night he began to think he had not gone about the matter with proper judgment; he had been trusting more to his ears than his eyes; he had made the large play-room, or the library, his head-quarters, both of which places the robber would be certain to make sure of before he commenced operations; he felt he had not exercised a wise discretion in sitting up with the gas on full flare; and he felt now that his opinion of his own police talents had been founded on an insecure basis. He would remedy all that for the future; he would sit in the dark, or creep barefooted about from place to place; he would enter on the task he had set himself with more zest and vigour; he would examine

into the details of any further robbery with a much closer scrutiny ; he would weigh every incident in each case with the most scrupulous care ; and then he fancied he should be in a better position to judge of what was best to be done. All these things had taken him a considerable time to think over—much more than he had any idea of—and the fire had almost gone out, when with a cold shiver he became aware of the fact, and turned to grope his way up to his room.

But hark ! what was that *silent noise* ? Surely there was a smothered sound coming from the direction of the wash-house ? Surely he heard a stealthy turning of a lock in one of the distant doors ? With every nerve of his body strung to its utmost tension he listened. There was no mistake ! beyond all doubt some one was making his way by the locked doors leading from the outer offices towards the room where Salter was. In a second the latter made up his mind that his chance had come at last ; rapidly, and without a sound, he slipped between the great coal-box and the door of communication—his heart beating no little with excitement, though of fear he felt absolutely none. Slowly and steadily the same silent noises—if I may use such a term—came on and on. Lock after lock, bolt after bolt, were opened and slipped with that quiet greasy sound betokening careful previous preparation ; long pauses (of listening, Horace presumed) were made ; now footfalls of the very faintest description could be heard by an ear abnormally excited ; and next—just at

the other side of the door — came a low whisper of inquiry. There were more than one, then! but Salter's heart would not have failed him had there been a dozen, and the low voice that seemed almost to breathe in his ear, only made him brace up every muscle and nerve for a spring at the foremost intruder the moment the door (which opened backwards into the wash-house) should swing back.

"All safe, Jim?" came the whisper through the panelling; "that d—d Salter is gone, I suppose?"

"Yes, of course," hissed out another voice, in a more confident and loud tone. "Don't be a fool! He turned down the gas and went to bed an hour ago or more."

Then the greased bolt turned slowly in the lock, the door was gently pulled back, and with a loud cry Horace sprang (as he thought in the darkness) at the throat of the first! But instinctively the men had jumped to one side as Horace made his bound, and he, blundering down the steep step leading into the wash-house, fell on his head on the flags; the door was instantly shut-to. In a second the two thieves were on top of him, and one clutched his windpipe while the other turned on his lantern to see who it was. In that brief second Horace, to his utter amazement, recognised his assailants as the two young men who lived in and had charge of the Kings Beeches farm-yard! The next instant he became insensible through semi-strangulation.

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"All safe, Jim?" came the whisper through the panelling; "that old fellow is gone. I suppose?"

"Yes, of course," hinted out another voice in a more confident and loud tone. "But: is it for? He turned down the gas and went to bed at four or more."

Then the groined door swung slowly in to reveal the door was gently pushed open and with a loud cry Horace sprang in. He found the intruder in the throat of the fire. He leaped forward and jumped to one side. A flash of light and a sound of blundering down the stairs. The intruder, who had entered the house, fell on in the wash-house.

stantly about the

top of him

other hand

head



The farm-yard at the Beeches was a ramshackle, tumble-down old place, well in keeping with the ancient and incongruous pile of buildings to which it belonged. It lay at some considerable distance away from the house, up a rather steep ascent, and was almost quite out of the way of any passers-by. In fact, no one had any legitimate business near there at all; none of the masters or officials of the establishment save the Controller (and he very seldom troubled it) were in the habit of visiting it; while the students, unless on rare occasions, when some wild fellow sought a tolerably safe road for getting unobserved out of bounds, were positively strangers to the place. In bygone years the Governors of the College had entered largely into farming business on their own account, so that the great rambling yard was crowded with buildings—barns, sheds, cattle-pens, cooking houses, and all the apparatus of large agricultural premises; while there were numerous dwelling-places for the servants, with cellars, and store-rooms for disposing of produce. But for a considerable period the farming operations had been discontinued by the proprietary, for the very sound reason that they were found to be a loss rather than a profit, and the whole extent of land had been let out to neighbouring farmers for grazing purposes, with the exception of just sufficient to find the community of Kings Beeches in vegetables and household stuff. To attend to the cultivation of the latter, two servants only were maintained, and had their residence

in one of the numerous houses that lumbered up the old farm-yard. A large dog was their sole companion in their dull place of abode, and no one whatever but those three ever entered or remained half-an-hour in the place. These young men—James Baigent and Ezra Gawn—were sons of highly respectable yeoman farmers of the neighbourhood; were both of most excellent character for sobriety, honesty, and general good conduct; and had been especially and with great care selected as perfectly safe and trustworthy persons to place in charge of the valuable even if disused premises. For a long time the two acted fully up to the characters they bore; they worked with a will at whatever lay before them to do; they were scrupulously exact in all the actions of their lives as regarded their employers' true interests; they were steady in their private lives as could possibly be expected; and they attended with great vigilance to the care and protection of the property committed to their charge. But in time there came a change; the restlessness so common to all men not yet quite matured in life came upon them both; they found themselves isolated, as it were, from all society of their fellows; they were like castaways on a desert island; they were monks in the cloister, or hermits in the lonely cell; they began to pine and hunger and thirst for the fellowship of other men; and the outcome of it all was that they both determined to quit the strict path of duty they had so long followed, and engage more in the pleasures of an

outdoor world that had almost, since the time of their seclusion, become a total stranger to them. Not that they bounded all at once, or in any one day, or one week, or one month even, to this conclusion; they arrived at it, as most things in this world are arrived at, by degrees almost imperceptible to themselves.

"Ez, I think I be a-going into Pitchcot this evening," said Jim Baigent, with a dreary yawn, one Saturday afternoon, lounging in the doorway of the old-fashioned and excessively gloomy house in the very centre of the spacious yard, where they had thought proper to take up their abode.

"Going to Pitchcot! Whoi, Jim, what be ye up to, man? there ain't nothing particular going on, loike?"

"Noa, not as I knows on; but I be mortal sick of this 'ere old bog of desolation. I wun't stand it no more, that I wun't; and I means to go and have a regular good spree!"

Ezra was far slower of comprehension in these matters than his companion; but somehow he, too, felt very much the influence of the dreariness of their locale, and the "regular good spree" desire was by no means confined to Jim Baigent. Not that either of them had ever "spread" before, but they had both known fellows who had; so, although their ideas on the subject were very hazy, they quite made up their minds that they would "go in" for some sort of unusual enjoyment, commencing, of course, with a visit to the handiest public-house.

"But, Jim, we dursna both leave the yard at noight, and no one to care it."

"Phut, man! who'd come into this barren old hole, with never a feed of grain for a mouse, nor a bit of a thing of any value in the whole of it? There's never a gipsy or tramp in the whole country soide would trouble to look in yon gate!" and Baigent gazed contemptuously round on the great barren walled-in expanse lying all around him, overgrown with musty grass, weeds, nettles, and all sorts of ill-growths.

"Maybe," replied the other; "still, 'tain't fair to our governors——"

"Well, ain't there the dog? and who, I'd loike to know, would face a barking dog in the noight's dark, and never know but what a lad might be standing by to slip un?"

But Ezra, this first evening of breaking through their former strict rules, could not be got to see the matter in that light at all; and as he threatened to complain if the other went off "without fair ploi like," Baigent was compelled to agree that one of them alone should go—the happy one to be selected by tossing. To his great delight the proposer of all the mischief won the toss, departed in great glee for his "spree" in Pitchcot, and came home about two o'clock on the Sunday morning, considerably "flustered" with strong drinks, with his hat smashed in, his coat split up the back, and every farthing of his money spent.

"Whoi, Lord Amoighty! where 'ast ye been?" ex-

claimed Ezra, when his companion came tumbling into their old house, rolling here and there like a Dutch galliot in a gale of wind, and very nearly breaking his neck down the steep flight of stone steps that led to the deep cellar where they kept their beer. But Jim Baigent, though he had a very excellent and clear idea of the spot in the recesses of the earth where their cask of small beer stood, was for some time almost speechless; and it was not until tolerably late the next day that he was in a position to distinctly say what had befallen him. The account he gave to Ezra of his "spree" would not seem a very enticing one to an ordinary individual; but village or country folk are easily contented with any dissipation that runs to beer, therefore Ezra was perfectly satisfied that his comrade had been in the very whirl of life the previous night. Jim had first had what he called "a good wet;" next he wetted "t'other eye;" then he fell in with some of his old friends, who jeered at him as a "sober-sides," who "never took no outing nor no pleasure;" and was made to stand them treat; and, finally, he was persuaded to take a hand at cards, when he lost considerably more than he gained. Presently a couple of ill-conditioned fellows, who had just arrived from the Coastshire Races, dropped into the place where the playing was going on, and began to bet on the game. Jim Baigent thought he saw a way to recover his losses, and laid wagers with them that he invariably lost; and then, after several more jorums of strong drink, he was

easily, induced to bet on a race meeting coming off the next week: but after that, again all was chaos. He only remembered confusedly a general row, a blow, a mist of struggling men; and when he awoke he found himself lying under a hedgerow half-way on his road home, with a broken hat, and the general disordered appearance he presented to his companion on his arrival at the farm-yard.

Ezra laughed hugely at what he called the "fun" of the thing, but was more deeply interested in the play and the betting. For though not so quick as the other, he was far deeper; he knew that many young men, no better off or no wiser than himself, made large sums of money on the turf, and he had long and eagerly watched for a chance of becoming personally acquainted with professionals in the noble science of gambling. He determined not to lose the opportunity, but went down to Pitchcot on the Monday evening, and was fortunate (as he thought it) enough to meet the fellows who had rooked Jim Baigent on the Saturday: Ezra did *not* get beery — perhaps it would have been better for him if he had—, but he returned to the farm-yard with a wonderful scheme for making the fortunes of the pair, provided they could raise funds enough to invest on certain horses that were "moral certainties" for some great races very soon to come off. Jim Baigent jumped eagerly at the chance; but where was the money to come from? He had none; Ezra only a very little.

However, they were easily—being young men of such good (agricultural) position, and sons of such fathers—obliged by a friend to whom they made a good excuse, on condition that the money he advanced should be punctually repaid at the end of the month, under penalty of an appeal to their fathers. Every one of their horses proved losers; they could not make up the money in time; and in an evil moment Ezra proposed that they should “borrow” some from the desks of the young gentlemen, and repay it when they made the “big win” he knew they would have on the next racing event. No difficulty whatever attended the carrying out of his proposition, for both were intimately acquainted with the boys and their desks. Cleaning the windows of boys’ side every fortnight or so had given them a close insight into all school matters; and with a little oil, and a few bent bits of wire, they were easily enabled to enter on their nefarious scheme. One theft led to another; the “big win” did not come off so readily as they had supposed; and once embarked on the deep ocean of crime, they sailed ahead freely and boldly.



HORACE SALTER'S PRISON.

CHAPTER III.

UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

WHEN Horace Salter came to himself he could not for a moment or two remember what had happened. By degrees his buzzing thoughts began to shape themselves into something like coherence; he felt around, and at once knew, wherever he might be, he certainly was not in his own bed. He opened his eyes, but could see nothing whatever, so intense was the darkness. Then he remembered standing at the play-room fire by the dying embers; the noise of the bolts slipping back in the out-offices; the advance through the wash-house; and finally, his spring at the ruffian, and his smash down on the hard flags. He also recollected distinctly that one second's light which showed him the faces of Jim Baigent and Ezra Gawn, and he felt no doubt that they knew he recognised them, and had on that account purposely rendered him insensible, to prevent his calling out their names. After that all was a blank till the present moment of revival—a revival that was not by any means pleasant, either bodily or mentally. He felt his head was very sore, but he did not think it was cut; his throat was fearfully tender all round, while just over the windpipe the gripe of his assailant must have been deadly; his

arms were free and unhurt; but round his ancles a strong iron shackle had been fixed, and the ends were bound together with a padlock. He was a prisoner!—a prisoner in such utter and complete darkness as he had never before imagined, while the damp cold air and general chilly feeling proved to him that he must be far underground.

He had been laid on a dry sack by his captors, for it was not as yet damp, like the earthen floor that he felt on one side of him, or like the horrible slimy wall supporting his back when he leaned up as well as weakness and pain would allow him. Somehow, the very trifling fact of having a sack given him to lie on, instead of being pitched on the damp, reeking earth, quite uncared for, seemed to bring a certain glimmer of comfort to his mind; from it he judged that no further physical harm was intended towards him, though what object there was in keeping him confined he could not imagine. He supposed that Baigent and Gawn were the chief instigators in his imprisonment; they might have accomplices certainly, but it was unlikely; and if without, surely they could have no sane intention of keeping him a captive. But then they knew that he had recognised them. Ah! that was it; they had noticed his sharp look of acknowledgment, and that was of course their reason for carrying him away with them, so as to prevent detection and conviction from his evidence. That horrid aphorism, “Dead men tell

no tales," rushed at once over his mind like a gust of ice-wind from the North Pole; a horrid shiver racked his frame from head to foot; it was not *fear*, but it was the natural action of nerves shocked by mental torture; and for a few seconds he trembled like one in an ague fit, while his foot-chains rattled again, as the fearful thought of secret murder obscured for a little his mental perspicuity and firmness. Not for himself, even at that moment, did he experience any decided dread, but he felt cruelly for the bitter anguish his fond parents would endure when he was found to be so unaccountably missing—missing, never to return again. The sack certainly showed some attention to his comfort; but, after all, might it not have been a mere accident that it was put there? or might it not have been the instinctive act of one formerly good and kind, but who, now being all that was bad, would not hesitate to commit the head crime of all—murder—rather than be convicted of the minor offence of housebreaking?

No, there was little consolation to be derived from the presence of the dry sack now that he investigated its *raison d'être*; nor was there any comfort to be found in speculating on the exact locality wherein he now lay. He calculated that it *must* be night still, for he felt sure there would be a glimmer, a spicula of light at least somewhere in his dungeon were it now daytime. But if it was still night, he must have been insensible only a very few hours, and yet he felt as though the affray with the thieves had taken place

ages before. He did not experience hunger at all, but there was a burning, raging thirst in his mouth and throat that he had never before even imagined—a thirst driving him nearly wild, and one that must be quenched, or he felt he should die. He would explore the fearful place of his imprisonment, and see what it would result in. The iron shackle prevented his walking, but he managed to crawl after a fashion, the echo of the rattling chain proving to him that his dungeon was lofty, probably domed, and of solid stone; so moving very carefully, and keeping close to the slimy wall, he made a complete tour of the place, discovering in the course of it that the shape was rectangular; that it was very large; entered, on the side farthest from his sack, by some half-dozen steep stone steps, surmounted by a door flush with the top one, so that not a glimpse of light could get through; while from some rotting timbers lying here and there, it would appear that the place had been a wine-cellar years ago. He calculated he had nearly reached to the sack again, which he determined to suck at for moisture for his burning mouth, when, to his great joy, his carefully put-out hand rested on a jug, and beyond that a dish apparently containing food. Hastily he smelt at the jug, put a drop of its contents on his parched tongue with his finger. Oh, ecstasy! it was cold water, and in a second he had taken such a gulp as almost choked him.

Having quenched his thirst, hunger came natu-

rally. He found the food to consist of bread, bacon, and cold potatoes—all of which he attacked with the greatest gusto, till nature was tolerably well satisfied, and he sat down again on his sack, feeling considerably better and more hopeful than he had been when he commenced his journey. Yet still the circumstances were very appalling. There was evidently no intention of murder—he dismissed that thought from his mind the moment he found the water and food; but the fact of having made him a prisoner, and keeping him in such a place, was a great increase of criminality on the part of the thieves that they could not fail to be aware of; and, being aware of it, they would probably hold him captive till—till—till—when? That was the difficulty. They were burglars and felons; his evidence alone would transport them both; therefore they could not afford to let him go until they had secured their retreat; and when, or how, could they manage that? Good God! Suppose they had already gone, leaving him the food and water to sustain him until he should be found by the people from the Beeches? A clammy, hideous, cold perspiration crept all over him at the thought. He might *never* be found! He felt sure he was hidden away in some ancient cellar in the old farm-yard that no one at the Beeches knew of, and there he would lie and rot in the most fearful agonies of the most fearful death—starvation—till the cruel end came—an end that never would be discovered. The horror of this thought drove

him nearly to madness; he yelled and screamed under its awful power till the whole slimy space seemed to echo with cries of the Lost—echoes that only died mockingly away when nature was exhausted, and he could scream no more. Then he sank for awhile into a state of torpor—almost despair.

There was no sound above, below, or around him—nothing but the fearful silence of that living tomb, a silence that was far worse than even the mocking responses of the slimy old walls to his own previous heart-cries. But the “hope that springs eternal in the human breast” came back to him in due course. Surely these men, that had once been so good, could not so suddenly, and so completely, turn into actual devils? Surely they would give him one fair chance of liberty, of life? Surely they were not so utterly hardened as to leave an inoffensive lad to die, because of their own crimes? Perhaps they had left some means of egress to be found by careful examination; and, enlivened a little by the thought, Horace Salter roused himself to further exertion, and again crawled to the steps to examine the door. He sounded it with his hands; he got one of the fungus-covered timbers and hammered and battered against it, only to find that it was evidently of immense thickness and of hard wood. He groped all over it as well as his shackled feet would permit him, but he could find no trace of lock, bolt, or keyhole: there was no chance of escape that way until it was opened from the other

side. From the dull sound of his hammering, too, he guessed that the door was only a second, or possibly a third one, on the flight of steep steps, and that therefore there was little or no chance of any sound from the cellar being heard in the upper part of the premises. Nevertheless, he did scream and shout with all his force as close up to the door as he could; he got the timber and battered and hammered again as long as his strength would permit, but it was all of no avail; so that, again worn and tired out with mental anguish, as well as with physical weakness, he had to retire to his sack, where in time he fell off into a sort of troubled doze of semi-unconsciousness—resting to the body, but wearing, rather than otherwise, to the mind.

Some hours afterwards, Horace Salter awoke with a start, and sat bolt upright before he was quite master of his thoughts. The door was apparently open, and standing on the steps, their faces yellow with the ghastly dull glare from an old horn stable-lantern, were Jim Baigent and Ezra Gawn, both armed with stout cudgels, and the latter carrying in his left hand a book with some paper hanging from between the leaves, an inkhorn, and stump of a quill pen. Anything whatever of fear, that might at any previous period of his incarceration have dwelt for a moment in Salter's breast, passed away in a second when he saw the two before him in the living flesh, and indignation alone made his heart beat and his nerves thrill again.

"You ruffians!" he cried, "what is the meaning of

all this? Do you intend to murder, or starve me to death?"

"Doan't ye put yourself out, Muster Salter," was the reply from Gawn, "we doan't intend ye no harm whatsomdever; only, ye see, we must look to ourselves after that little—little accident loike, last noight——"

"Accident! you thieves, burglars, felons!"

"Now you just be quiet, Muster Salter," put in Jim Baigent, in a deprecating sort of voice. "As Ez have told ye, we doan't mean no harm; but tain't loikely, tain't in reason, to suppose we can let ye go scot free, and we be transported for this job. We knew, we did, that ye seed us when the loight was turned on, so, ye see, we was forced loike to take and lock you up here——" He paused as if expecting a reply; but Horace Salter had in a moment resolved on a policy of silence, until he could gain some tangible clue to their intentions, when it would be quite time to answer, according to circumstances.

Gawn then took up the legend.

"Muster Salter, there's no use bandying hard words, or making any fuss; we knows ye can transport us if you get out and loike to do it; but——" this with an cminous dark look, "take a fule's advice and *don't loike it!* Ye see, we have you here safe enough; not all the polis in Coastshire, or in England for that matter, would find ye here" (the truth of this was, of course unknown to Horace, amply proved during the ensuing few days,

when the whole farm-yard was ransacked without any discovery being made), "no, nor all the polis in the world neither. But that's nothing; we've got you, and we mean to keep you, unless you will write us on this here paper, on your sacred honour (for we know ye well enough to know ye'd stick to that), a promise never to whisper to living mortal soul what ye seen us doing last night, and never, by hint or by wink, let on that ye know nothing at all about us in this business. But even that ain't enough; ye must swear to your God on this here blessed Bible—so help your God—you'll never breathe, or look, or sign, one atom of what ye know, no more than the dead! If ye do these two things—for, again I tell ye, we knows ye'd stick to 'em—then we'll let you go free this very night, and no harm done."

"Ay, that we will, Muster Salter," added Baigent when his comrade paused; "we'll trust your word of honour and your oath to God; we knows ye well enough for that."

"You villains!" burst out Horace when they had finished; "you scoundrels, of all the scoundrels the world ever held! Do you really think for one second I would make such a promise—take such an oath? I'd sooner die ten times over than not expose you and hand you over to the justice you so richly deserve. Let me out instantly, or you make matters only worse. Do you think I mind your foolish threats? Do you think I shan't be searched for and found? Do you

believe, you fools, you drivelling idiots, that people can be kidnapped and hidden away in England like stolen dogs or rabbits? Let me out, I say, at once, or it will be all the worse for you! Let me out instantly!" He tried to rise to his feet in his passion of indignation, but the chain effectually prevented him, and he fell back on the sack.

The two fellows laughed out at him in derision.

"Ye woan't, woan't ye? well then we'll see about yer getting out? Get out of this! Well, that is a good one!" and Jim Baigent really laughed outright at the idea. Gawn took it rather more seriously.

"Ye'll never get out of this alive, Muster Salter," he said, with the old black ominous look lowering on his face, "till ye promise and swear what we want. Ye're as good as dead there this minute if ye don't; and no trouble to knock you on the head either! We bean't fules, we bean't agoing across the sea for a chap loike you, we bean't agoing to disgrace our own folk" (what strange ideas of disgrace even the most criminal persons have!) "by being tried up at 'soizes and transported. Ye jest think agin on it; ye'll have lots of time and no one to interrupt ye. Come along, Jim, and let the cockerel plume himself a bit!" With which words they both, with a mocking grin at their victim, retreated up the steps, bolting and barring the massive door behind them. As soon as the door was fast shut all sound came to an end—an overpowering argument in favour of Gawn's remark, that all the police in

England would not find poor Horace Salter thus buried in the bowels of the earth. Yet in spite of that fact, as well as the threats, the sneering laughter that spoke of their assured safety, the ominous looks, and the downright declaration that he should never leave the dungeon alive unless he gave the necessary securities for absolute silence, Horace Salter felt rather more confident after the interview than he had done before it. His captors were evidently open to treat with him; and, though he would readily have died sooner than compromise his honour and his sense of justice by taking the oath of secrecy they required, he began to think that his firmness might coerce them, sooner or later, into flying the country, after giving notice of *his* whereabouts, or at least leaving him means for obtaining egress by his own exertions.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRUGGLE FOR DEAR LIFE.

HORACE SALTER had counted his reckoning without consulting his hosts. They had no intention whatever of either leaving England or giving him any chance of escape. In the first place, they saw no reason nor had they any desire to quit the country ; and in the second, there were no funds available to pay for their flight. The proceeds of the robbery previous to the intended one that Horace had—so unhappily for himself—frustrated, had indeed cleared off their more pressing liabilities ; but they had no ready money and no chance of getting any more, for they dared not attempt the scholars' boxes again after the last *fiasco*. Besides, they had not the wit to devise a safe plan of escape, and so determined to remain on at the Beeches, being quite convinced that solitude, darkness, and hunger would in due time, and the natural course of circumstances, break the spirit of the lad, when he would be only too ready to give them the required pledges. Strange as it might appear, they felt a perfect confidence that if he did so pledge himself all would be well. They knew well the sterling nature of his character ; they knew that it was a standing saying in the school, both with masters and boys, that Horace Salter

never swerved one iota from his word; while with the additional mystic security of a "Bible oath," they would feel perfectly safe. Nearly always there is some feeling of this sort in a mind that has *become* criminal, instead of being born or trained up to evil—something of a respect for a good character such as they themselves may once have borne, and something of trust in a still intact virtue that they are aware of, and admire all the more that they possess it no longer themselves. Therefore they determined to bide their time, nothing doubting of the ultimate attainment of their end.

Accordingly, the next night, about the same time, *i.e.*, when the whole country side was at rest, and there was not the remotest chance of a living being coming even to the outer gates (which nevertheless were carefully locked), they visited their prisoner again in just the same manner as before, and again made to him a similar proposal. Again he indignantly and sternly refused to listen to their propositions; again they pointed out to him the utter hopelessness of escape; again he placed his faith in the impossibility of an Englishman in England being kidnapped and hidden away; and again they jeered at and left him—first giving him a dish of broken food and a fresh jug of water, luxuries that he ravenously enjoyed far more than he had previously believed would ever be possible. Night by night was this cruel scene enacted without change or difference, save that as the

weary days went on the firmness and heroism of the boy increased rather than diminished, and he was more determined than ever to die rather than give pledges which he regarded as criminal in the highest degree in the sight of both God and man.

I fully intended to go into the shocking details of his captivity, to show you what an amount of suffering a true-hearted English boy can undergo in the cause of justice and truth; to tell, day by day, all the miseries both mental and bodily that the wretched lad endured with a firm belief and trust in his Maker; but on looking over the notes taken from his own lips, I find the numerous circumstances so utterly hideous and inhuman that I cannot foul my pen, or your mind, by narrating them; and I shall leave to the imagination the *minutiæ* of this imprisonment. The broad facts I will briefly set down, the particulars each individual reader must fill in for himself: A boy in an utterly dark, noisome, and rank cellar, deep underground, for more than a month; not one glimmer of light except once a day, and that only for a few moments; at the same period a meal that a beggar would turn up his nose at, while a parlour dog would absolutely refuse it; no means whatever for washing or personal cleanliness; no change of clothes; no covering at night but an old sack; no companions save rats and vermin; and his legs firmly chained and padlocked!

"Give me but a bucket to wash in; a sheet to put over my naked limbs" (for he had huddled his

rotting outside clothes in a corner, to escape the nuisance of them); "let me, for Heaven's dear sake, out if it is only for five minutes a day!" he would beg and pray of his iron-hearted masters when they came to pay their nightly visit. But they would only offer him again and again the paper and the Bible; and on his still refusing to give these pledges, jeer at him for a pig-headed fool, who was killing himself through his obstinacy. Horace began to fear his mind would go. He prayed strenuously and constantly to his Creator to avert this greatest of all earthly misfortunes; he took every means he could think of to distract his mind from his awful situation; and more than ever he cherished hopes of escape—but when? His brain became preternaturally sharpened to every possible chance, and hardly ever altogether ceased working at this seemingly impossible problem of escape. At first they had commenced to diminish his daily dish of broken food; but he appeared to sink so rapidly under the diminution, that they feared evidently he would die; and as they by no means desired that consummation, at least as yet, the usual quantity—even more indeed, and of better quality perhaps—was returned, while occasionally Ezra Gawn came down by himself in the morning with a little milk and brown bread. This Ezra was the stranger character of the two; while fulminating the most awful and brutal threats (for to that they had come now) against the prisoner, he still showed some greater

sort of humanity towards him than did his mate, Baigent. For instance, he gave him grease to rub on his shackled ankles, and even loosed them a little, yet so imperceptibly as hardly to influence in the least the sores that were forming on the poor fellow's legs.

With the slightly improved food, and the occasional *solus* visits of Gawn, came a plan into Horace Salter's head which he instantly proceeded to put into training, with a scarce defined hope that it might, by a miracle, succeed. It took him long days to properly work out its details, that may be here summed up in a very few words. He each day divided his food allowance into twelve equal portions, one of which he consumed, as accurately as he could guess, every hour. This he did to keep up his bodily health to the highest possible standard on such a short allowance. Two-thirds of the jug of water supplied him he devoted, no matter how he might rage with thirst, to wetting (it could not be called cleansing) his limbs every day, so as to keep the nervous system in due order. This he accomplished with a piece of rag saved from his shirt. His muscular strength he exercised in every possible way, and constantly, by wielding one of the heaviest pieces of timber he could find round and round his head with either arm, and going through every possible gymnastic manœuvre he could think of. His legs were of course more difficult to deal with, on account of the offensive sores that had broken out; still, in spite of all the pain it caused, he managed to keep them active and

lissome, and he fondly believed that he could even run, were they unchained. And, finally, with immense care and positive study of every knot and wrinkle, he could feel (for of course he could not see a stime) he selected the heaviest, most handy piece of wood he could find amongst the broken-down stillions, and fashioned and scraped it into something like a decent weapon with a piece of a brown pitcher that he broke on purpose. This weapon, it is scarcely necessary to say, he kept concealed from his gaolers, as did he also any indication of the other portions of his plan.

One morning Ezra Gawn came down by chance, and found the lad in a dead stupor. For a long time he could not rouse him, and when at last he shook a heavy groan out of Horace, and turned him round to the ghastly yellow glare of the horn-lantern, he found his face a fearful object to look upon—the lips were horribly cut as though they had been bitten nearly through; the chin, indeed the whole features, were smeared and clotted with blood, while a quantity of thick slimy matter was slobbering all over the neck and chest. His victim had evidently had an epileptic fit! Such things were common enough in Coastshire, and Gawn had often before seen their results. Hurriedly he ran up the stairs to procure some stimulant, and when he returned, a few minutes afterwards, Horace had again fallen off in a faint, and was even more difficult to rouse than before. Copious applications of brandy, both internally and externally, at

last brought him to; and, with a great sigh of relief, he managed to sit up, leaning against the wall, and gasping for breath.

“Oh, for Heaven’s sake!—air, a little air!” he croaked out hoarsely. The brutal captor was not yet sufficiently brutal to contemplate murder—for it was little else he thought—for the first time without some dread of the results. In great terror now lest the lad should die, he propped him up and tried to make him walk towards the stone steps. But the shackles quite prevented that, and the gangrened ankles refused their office. Gawn set the brandy-flask down in a corner, took a key from his pocket, and unlocked the padlock holding the shackles. His legs thus freed, Horace was able to half crawl, half allow himself to be dragged, to the foot of the steps, down which, when the door was thrown wide open, came a cold draught of pure air. It was almost too much for his enfeebled frame, and as he lay against the steps, he seemed almost on the point of fainting off again.

“Do not leave me, Gawn!” he whispered, as the one was about to fetch some more of the brandy, while the other continued to hold him up till somewhat of his strength returned. He then asked to be placed again on his sack, as he was much better, and Gawn went away, locking the door as carefully as ever after him. But at dinner-time he, in company with his confederate, again visited the cellar, bringing with them some greasy broth they had made, which they

made Horace, much against his will, swallow down with plenty of bread. After that they declared he was much better (he certainly did not look so), and they did not come again until the usual nightly visit, when their prisoner appeared to be in a very low state indeed, though calm, collected, and strong enough still to reiterate in a feeble whisper his determination never, *never* to give the pledges they asked of him.

"Well, please yourself! I shaan't trooble coming after ye no more than ushal," said Jim Baigent; "nor need you, I think, Ez?"

"Not I; he may rot and die first!" was the brutal answer. "I'll just have a look at ye in the morning, master; and let me tell you, I expect to find ye a stiff un. So ye'd best jest give in at once—sign this here paper and take the oath we want, and in two minits I'll have ye upstairs warm and snug by the kitchen fire, with a good supper and a snug bed to sleep in till ye get strong! Come!"

"Never—never—*never*!" was the hoarse, barely audible reply; and, with a jeer about "stinking corpseses," the villains went away for the night.

It was later than usual when Gawn came down the next morning. The fellow trembled no little as he fumbled at the lock of the door, for he really feared to find the lad dead, and he did not at all like the idea. At last he opened the door and held out the lantern, to look towards the sack. In the dim light he was glad to discern the usual bundle still lying on

it, and with renewed confidence he went down to the bottom.

Two tremendous blows from the stair-angle sent him staggering across the cell!—a third, straight across the nape of the neck, sent him crashing headlong to the floor, bleeding like a pig! Quick as lightning Horace Salter—for he was the assailant, and the epileptic fit and the fainting had been all sham—seized the brandy-bottle that had been inadvertently left behind the previous day, snatched the keys from the ruffian's senseless fingers, pitched his water over the broken lantern, crept as swiftly as his gangrened legs would permit up the steps, slammed the door to, and locked and bolted it; and then paused, in a whirl of conflicting emotions, for breath, and to think. He took a good long pull at the brandy-bottle, and the strong stimulant at once nerved him for future action. He felt pretty sure, from the experience of yesterday, as well as of previous days, that Jim Baigent would not be about the premises, but he *might* be, and in such a desperate crisis no chance of safety must be thrown away. He had resumed his trousers from the foul heap whereon they had lain for so long, and in their rotting cloth-band he managed to secure his brandy; then firmly grasping his trusty and blood-stained club in his right hand, he cautiously crept up the winding stone stairs until he came to a trap-door, which he gently raised, and found himself in the half-light—brilliant sunshine it seemed to his now owl-like eyes—of an ordinary beer-cellar.

He had been, then, in a cellar below a cellar—certainly no one would have found him there—and when he shut down the trap, firmly securing it with the heavy flag-stone that fitted over it exactly, he did not wonder at the certainty the two displayed that he would never be heard of, for it concealed entirely the whole opening. Ezra Gawn was therefore quite secure, and Horace had only three more enemies to encounter—viz., time, the dog, and Jim Baigent. The first must be slipping on, and night bring back the third; the second might bark with the same result; and the third would surely, if an encounter took place, overpower him in his weakened state, and perhaps kill him out of hand. Yet he could not afford to trust himself in the daylight in his purblind state; so, patiently he sat down nearest one of the dim gratings that let in a modicum of light, and counted five hundred before he would essay the glare of day. By that time his eyes had become a little accustomed to the change, and when he slowly, and with great care, ascended into the kitchen, he could see pretty distinctly, and rejoiced to find the place empty. Hastily, then, he snatched up a smock-frock to cover his naked limbs, secured his dilapidated trousers with a band formed out of a long towel, shoved his precious brandy flask in the smock-pocket, and, seizing an old yeomanry sabre that stood in a corner in place of his bludgeon, he took a careful survey of the ground leading towards the gate, and at once started across the yard at as rapid a rate as he

could muster. The fresh air made him faint and giddy, so that he staggered to and fro like a drunken man. At once he had recourse again to his brandy, at which he took no stinting pull. It revived him, and gave him strength for the further effort, and he hurried on at a pace no doctor who had seen his horrid leg wounds would have believed possible. Halfway across the yard the watch-dog rushed out at him from behind the corner of the hay-stand, where his kennel stood, and nearly had him by the throat. With an instinctive slash of the naked sabre, Horace clove through the brute's skull, and laid him dead on his path: then he resumed his way, passed out of the gate without further adventure, and in ten minutes more he lay, in a dead trance from the reaction, on the flags close outside the great western door of his dear old College!

It needs not to tell how he was found by the horror-stricken Red Weskit, bleeding afresh from his recent self-inflicted face wounds (he had cut his lips and chin with sharp pieces of the broken pitcher to represent the bites of a fit), in ragged and foul-smelling attire, with matted and filthy hair, a ghastly, wan, and careworn face, and a blood-stained sabre clutched convulsively in his right hand. Nor need I speak of the astonishment and joy of all, including even Mr. Eldred, at seeing the long-lost one again; of the eager curiosity evinced to know the details, or even hints, of what had happened; of the rushing to and fro of the boys in their excitement; of the postings and gal-

lopings for doctors and parents; or of the tremendous and successful effort Horace Salter made to rouse himself sufficiently to give a lucid account of who had made him captive, and of where Ezra Gawn then was—are not all these things now known to many old Beeches, all of whom are willing and able to supplement this dry record? The police were at once communicated with, and seized Jim Baigent after a desperate struggle, while Gawn was taken out of the concealed cellar more dead than alive, after the fearful blows the despairing boy had delivered on his head in all the mad excitement of his struggle for dear life. They were both tried at the next assizes, and transportation for life was the sentence passed on the two inhuman scoundrels, who, not content with a series of crimes rendering them felons, were quite ready to become murderers sooner than let the witness of their guilt escape.

For a long time Horace Salter lay in a desperate state from the sufferings he had gone through. An excellent constitution, however, proved too much for disease, and his recovery was as rapid as could be desired. Should you wish to see him now, you must go to South Africa, where, after many trials, vicissitudes, wanderings, and adventures—all undergone in the sacred cause of duty—he has found a happy and profitable field for his labours as a missionary bishop.



Story the Thirteenth.

AN AWFUL CRISIS.

CHAPTER I.

"PACKING-UP DAY."

PACKING-UP Day, at last! Law, how glad I am! Hurrah, boys! hurrah!" shouted Mick Donovan, in a very whirlwind of joy, on the morning of that day of all days at Kings Beeches—"packing-up day," immediately preceding the one on which the school broke up for the mid-summer holidays.

"What's 'packing-up' to you and the other Irish fellows, Mick? You know you can't get away to your dirty pig-boat until the day after to-morrow," remarked Gilbert Robinson, a sneering sort of fellow, who professed a contempt for the lads belonging to the sister isle that he was far from feeling on sundry

occasions when the Patlanders treated him to a thrashing for his supercilious airs.

"Dirty pig-boat, indeed!" put in Gerald Blake, with considerable warmth; "I'll dirty pig-boat ye, if ye'll just step behind the Ball Alley."

But the cautious Robinson, who saw a fair chance of returning to the bosom of his family in London with a fine pair of black eyes if he accepted Blake's invitation, declined the honour on the ground that all fighting was out of the question now, and slunk off in-doors with his tail very considerably between his legs.

"Well, but, as a matter of fact, you are *not* going to pack up to-day?" asked Jack Hassard, who was himself of half Celtic blood, though his parents lived in England.

"Why not? Better be ready than late any day; and sure when there's only one day between us it makes little odds if we put our traps together on the Monday or on the Tuesday?" So said Gerald Blake, a very wild specimen of the Hibernian race, who never could be got to do things as others did them, and was in consequence always in hot water with both masters and scholars. He was a laughing, harum-scarum sort of a fellow; thoughtless to a degree; scampish more from fun than from real love of what was bad; and so erratic in all his actions that he was generally supposed not to be quite right in his head. His nickname was "Maddy"—a supposition on which he traded largely, as it formed a capital excuse for all sorts of scrapes,

which he hugely enjoyed. He was never out of mischief, but his little failings in that respect sat on him very lightly, and as he was never accused of direct evil intentions by any of the masters, he retained a sort of free-and-easy good character that saved him from entering into real harm. Many and many a boy is ruined in life because some foolish master thinks proper to accuse him of wrong when such is not present. "I have the name; why not have the game?" has flung many a fine youth (who may have committed trifling boyish indiscretions which too zealous a superior has labelled "crime") into the foul depths of sin, whence extraction, if ever accomplished at all, has been a matter taking half a lifetime to manage. But Gerald Blake had never been so labelled, and hence he retained all the mischief of his high animal spirits without their leading him into much real wrong. Mick Donovan, his great ally, was of a different class altogether. Without one whit more harm in his moral composition than Blake—indeed, he had probably rather less—some officious person had fixed on him the burden of wrong; in fact, Mick was one of those unfortunates who have been "found out," and, as a result, nothing was supposed to be too bad for him, and nothing of evil took place at the Beeches that he was not at once suspected of participating in.

As to this matter of packing-up, Gilbert Robinson was no doubt right. There was no need for the Irish boys to do so until the following day, for the very

good reason that their boat for Ireland did not touch at the nearest port until the second after "packing-up day," and very few of them indeed made the long railway journey necessary to reach Holyhead and Kingstown. This was a very sore point with the Hibernians, who looked upon themselves as losers of one day of the vacation in consequence of the delay, and were besides very considerably chaffed by their Saxon brethren. But it could not be helped; every year it was the same; so they put the best face on it they could, while as for the "chaff" they were usually quite competent to return that in full, with a good deal to spare.

"I say, you fellow!" shouted Bill Bolton, about an hour after breakfast, when the dormitories were swarming with lads looking out their things; "I say, did you ever hear such a thing?"

"Hear what, you gaby?" queried another from the far end of the dormitory. "How can we know, unless you tell us what it is?"

"Why, that old fool of a Red Weskit won't let us have our hats until to-morrow."

"What nonsense! What does he mean by it? Why, he will make us all late to-morrow morning," put in Robinson, "with his rubbish. It takes him two or three hours to give them out, and we'll be in a pretty mess if we miss our trains."

"Well, he won't give them—that's all. I went to ask him just now, and he quite snapped me up about

it," went on Bolton, who felt much aggrieved, and did not hesitate to express that feeling pretty loudly. Of course, during term-time at the Beeches, the students were compelled all to wear the ordinary trencher, or "mortar-board" cap of ordinary college life, and their vacation "chimney-pots" (of which it was *de règle* for each to have one) were consigned to the safe custody of Peter Westcott, who stored them away in long cupboards in the dormitories, specially devised for the purpose. These cupboards, being subdivided into a number of pigeon-holes, as it were, each one with its own lock and key, formed, in fact, a series of hat-boxes, all joined together, and were always kept carefully locked by Peter, so that the proprietors should not have access improperly to their out-of-college head-gear, and that no mischievous fellow should mix the various sorts and sizes, or change them from one to another box. The great bunch of keys belonging to these cupboards Red Weskit kept jealously concealed in the "Den," and very few, indeed, could make out where they lay. As a rule, Peter always gave out the hats to their owners on packing-up day, but this year he saw, or fancied he saw, some good reason for change, and hence the discontent of Bill Bolton and the others.

"Let us go and mob the old boy!" suggested one aspirant for fame. His idea was eagerly snatched at by the others, and a large number at once banded themselves together, and marched on the den in military order. It is hardly necessary, I suppose, to

tell my readers that on such an occasion as "packing-up day" all College discipline was very nearly at an end; that the masters, for the most part, kept studiously out of the way; that the Principal was conspicuous by his absence; and that, in fact, a sort of lawlessness ruled supreme—a species of saturnalia of freedom—and that Peter Westcott, though he had striven in the good cause with unflagging energy, had never yet been able to combat successfully the revolution which the approaching holidays unfailingly brought out year after year. Indeed it was the most trying time of the whole term for Peter. Alone he had to stem a torrent of wildness that seemed as if nothing could withstand it: alone he had to fight against excesses that were, to say the least of them, full of danger to the perishable property of the College: alone he strove to maintain the standard of authority: and alone he invariably had to bemoan himself on the utter failure of his efforts.

"Hats! hats! we want our hats!" burst from a perfect Babel of voices, as the unruly mob from the dormitories surrounded the den, wherein sat Peter endeavouring to preserve an appearance of calmness by pretending to read his copy of the *Times*.

"Give us our hats, Peter!" shouted Bill Bolton defyingly, as he stepped forward as ringleader. The old servant saw there was no use in holding out any longer without parley, so he came to the door of the den to explain:

"I cannot, Master Bolton, and for a very good reason, too, as you well know."

"Hats! hats! we want our hats!" sung out the chorus defiantly, until Bolton motioned them to be silent.

"I don't know of any good reason; what do you mean, Peter?"

"Oh, you know well enough! Don't you remember this time last year, when I gave them out on 'packing-up day,' you and a lot more young scamps got rushing up and down the dormitories smashing all of them you could lay hands on? And a pretty sight the young gentlemen were, in consequence, when going away from the Buncombe railway station!"

Bill Bolton could not deny the soft impeachment; he *had* done very much what Red Weskit had accused him of—nay, more, he had suffered himself from similar incursions of other wild lads, and had a well-defined recollection of the shame he felt at driving through the streets of London, and up to his father's door, in a fashionable West-end square, with such a disgracefully damaged head-piece as drew down on him the ridicule of every street urchin and cabman he encountered. Other fellows had a similar lively memory of what had happened in their own several cases, so that as Peter went on to explain his full determination to prevent a recurrence of the disgrace of broken hats at Kings Beeches this year, by not giving them out to the owners until they were actually wanted, the great

bulk of the lads came to see the matter from his point of view, and in a few moments the whole body rushed away, to resume the extraordinary process which they were pleased to call "packing-up."

The school-rooms, class-rooms, play-rooms, libraries, dormitories—every hole and corner on boys' side—were littered all over with rubbish. Torn papers, half-bound books, pens, clothes, old odds and ends of all sorts with which boys delight to stuff their desks and boxes, were flung here, there, and everywhere in the direst confusion and untidiness. Pets were let loose, or given away to "naturalistic" boys, who promised to care for them at home; cages, traps, tools, toys, bats, balls—goodness only knows what—were pitched about as if they had never been of any value at all; while even too-long-hoarded cakes, sweetmeats, or "goodies" of any sort, were recklessly spilt out on the flagging as things of no longer any account. Up and down, in and out, round and about the old halls, the old passages, the crooked and winding stairs, rushed the lads, wild with excitement, and quite beyond all sensible control; while the shrieks of fun, laughter, and chaff that so unceasingly echoed throughout the College would have been perfectly maddening to any ears but those of a scholar of Kings Beeches. Some careful lads put up their things as early as possible, and as neatly as their hands could devise; but, alas for their trouble! roving bands of desperadoes—the idle, the lazy, the wild, and the mad—would come charging down on the hapless

neat one, tell him he was stealing a march on the other fellows, turn out the whole contents of his boxes on the floor in a state of most inextricable confusion, and mayhap (as if that was not enough) they would take the whole belongings of some half-dozen of these neat ones, jumble them all up together, and then retire with howls of laughter, to perpetrate some other similar outrages.

Jovial appetites there were for dinner that day, the clatter of tongues—for of course there was “talking” allowed—mingling with the sharper clash and clatter of knives, forks, glasses, plates, and dishes.

“No more ‘old horse,’ thank goodness!” was the pious exclamation of one youth, whose efforts on the beef which he so ignominiously abused were nevertheless constant and strenuous.

“No more barrel-washings!” cried another, swallowing down with great gusto a mug of the very fair beer with which the table was liberally supplied; and “No more ‘tuppeny-tighteners!’” shouted a third, demolishing a suet-dumpling that he so designated.

“Mick Donovan, my boy, you’ll have all the praties to yourself to-morrow!” was the sneer of Bill Bolton, in allusion to the detention of the Irish boys.

“Law! what a ‘buster’ Mick will go in for!” replied another; “why, Red Weskit will have to carry him to bed, he’ll be so full, when there are no civilised people to prevent him over-eating himself!”

"Yes, and 'Maddy' Blake will be every bit as bad," muttered Gilbert Robinson, *sotto voce*.

"'Maddy' Blake'll come and punch your great pudding-head for you!" threatened Gerald, who had overheard the remark. Mick Donovan said nothing; but he looked whole volumes of revenge while the chaff lasted, and it was evidently with the greatest difficulty he could refrain from there and then getting up a jolly good row; for the English boys would not let them alone, but kept harping on their detention, on the humble means of locomotion (a pig-boat, they declared one of the best Channel steamboats) they were to travel by, and on the disgrace accruing to all who were not allowed by their parents to proceed home by the Holy-head route. Now, this was a very sore subject with all the Irish boys—and there were a good many at Kings Beeches—who resented strongly any imputations on their fathers' means. It was, of course, much cheaper to go by boat, and for that reason parents of economical habits were quite justified in sparing expense, even at the cost to their sons of the loss of a holiday. But the English never could be brought to see this; their jeers were not lessened in any one degree, but rather increased, until whole storms of bitter "chaff" from all sides poured down on the devoted heads of Gerald Blake, Mick Donovan, and the other "pig-drivers," as they came to be contemptuously called. Now, any fellow of pluck can stand up against chaff and sneering on the part of one or two; he can fix on an individual

assailant, and show fight when the joking becomes unbearable through having broken over all bounds of moderation ; but it is a very different thing to have to bear it from a whole college of excited boys, all banded together for assault, and carried away to excess ; so that Gerald and Mick speedily felt the hopelessness of bearing up against the storm, and at length fairly turned tail and bolted out of the dinner-hall, followed by shrieks of derisive laughter and more cruel remarks than any that had been before uttered. Burning with passion, annoyance, and positive pain, the two lads deserted the College altogether for that evening, not even putting in an appearance at supper-time, when they usually performed their parts as eaters to admiration, and went off to Pitchcot, where they were sure of a welcome at the King's Rest—a welcome all the more enjoyable that there was nothing of fear of future consequences attached to it, for the very good reason that no one cared in the least what was done on “packing-up day,” unless, indeed, it was something perfectly outrageous.

It was quite half-past ten, or perhaps even later, that night before all the lads got to bed, worn and tired with their day's exertions and excitement, but long before that hour the two Irish boys had returned from their mild orgie at Pitchcot, and were seen by many to be fast asleep in bed before ten o'clock. There was, however, but little sleep for any one at Kings Beeches

that night—at least for any one who happened to be on boys' side, for the whole time “alarums and excursions” were kept up with considerable vigour from upper to lower dormitory, and *vice versa*, while the denizens of Grecians' Grove made and repelled numerous attacks with all the energy and vigour their increased strength gave them. Towards morning, however, there was a more general lull; fellows began to drop asleep, as they sat up in their beds on the watch for a flying pillow or a wet sponge, from pure fatigue, while loud and prolonged snores from all sides proved that the drowsy god had come down in full force on by far the greatest portion of the scholars. The gas was not put out, or even lowered, though it might just as well have been extinguished altogether—the day breaking at that time of year at a very early hour of the morning.

CHAPTER II.

"BREAKING-UP DAY."

AT last the weary hours worked through the night—restless as it had been for many—and the great, the glorious day of the whole year—the day that had been looked forward to for months and months past—the day that had been marked with brilliant large red crosses in almanacks—the day that had been numbered up to, and checked off, as each twenty-four hours rolled by into eternity—the day that had been hungered and thirsted for—the day that had been beseeched and prayed for—the never-to-be-forgotten "breaking-up day," with all its great store of anticipated delights and joys—broke over Kings Beeches in glorious majesty, and was hailed with cheers of wild delight by the excited lads of the old College! By the time the sun began to peep over the rising grounds to the eastward, most of the fellows were thoroughly roused, while a goodly portion were already dressed, and fussing about in an excitement over nothing utterly inconceivable to the adult mind. But the quieter ones sat on their bedsides in calm pleasure, as they gossiped with chosen chums over the events of the previous day, over the very different journeys they were to presently commence, over the various places where the happy vacation days

were to be passed, over the delights that were in store for all, and sometimes over the natural regrets intimate friends felt at being parted for even such a short time. Deeper regrets there were, too—regrets that sunk deep into some sympathetic minds—regrets of those who had finished the college course, and were now about to take their departure from dear friends, from many hallowed associations, perhaps for ever, and commence the battle of life in real earnest. Friends must part, we all know, but the knowledge gives us but little assistance when the dreary time of final leave-taking comes ; and perhaps I should not be far out were I to say that the regrets were that morning at Kings Beeches almost on a par with the rejoicings. For though the latter were more tumultuous and louder-tongued, the former were deeper and more heartfelt. Many of the Uppers were leaving for good ; some of the Lovers had sound reasons for believing that their parents would not send them back again to that (if to any) school, and, in consequence, there was many a sore heart, covered, mayhap, with a smiling or laughing expression of face, that summer morning in the dormitories and corridors and halls of old Kings Beeches. Amongst these very quiet ones, then, were the Irish boys, who were to wait until the next day to catch their boat ; indeed, some of them felt so low and despondent at the chaff of the previous day, at the idea of being left behind even for a solitary twenty-four hours, that they refused to rise until their usual time,

and of this class were Gerald Blake and Mick Donovan.

"Now, then, rouse and bitt! you lazy lubbers!" cried out Gilbert Robinson (whose father kept a yacht, whence the sea-terms the son affected), running past Donovan's bed, yelling at the top of his voice. Mick turned on his pillow and made a grimace at the other, as he became awake, and recognised his enemy.

"Yah, slobber-chops!" (that was Robinson's nickname). "What d'ye mean by making that row?"

"Get up, you bog-trotter, you, or I'll give you a dose of 'cold pig'—yes, and you too," he continued, as Gerald turned round and yawned.

"I'd like to see ye, or any spalpeen like ye, give me 'cold pig,'" retorted the latter in a tone of supreme contempt, which he backed up by dexterously flinging his pillow right in Robinson's face, with such force as sent him flying over an adjacent bedstead. Robinson picked himself up again, muttered an execration, ran away, and presently returned with a soused sponge to put his threat of "cold pig" into instant execution at Gerald Blake's expense. Coming up quietly in the opposite direction to that by which he had retreated, he found Blake and Donovan sitting close together on the bed of the former in earnest confabulation as to the time of their boat the next day. Creeping up on a chair close behind them, unobserved, the cat-like Robinson poised the dripping sponge for a second, then flung it down right between the faces and breasts of both,

rushing away before the two had recovered from the gasping astonishment superinduced by their unexpected cold bath! They were absolutely drenched, for they had nothing but their night-shirts on, and as they rose in a blind rage to follow and chastise their tormentor, they were greeted with such yells and screams of laughter from all the other fellows as nearly drove the pair frantic. With a wild Irish howl of passion they bounded after Robinson, but he had too good a start, and by the time they had reached the dormitory door, he (being fully dressed) was well on his way to masters' side, and quite out of reach of all immediate vengeance.

Down-stairs, in front of the great western door, there was a great muster of coaches (three of them four-horsed), omnibuses, pleasure-vans, flies, waggonettes—indeed, I could not enumerate one-half of the various kinds of “traps”—which were being marshalled into proper order by old Red Weskit, who shone resplendent this day in all his glory as leader and master of all the ceremonies. Already, pushing Uppers had secured the best seats on the coaches, bribery being freely resorted to to secure eligible positions; while some of the more knowing ones had made parties for flies or waggonettes, as being more independent and man-of-the-worldish. Lowers made strenuous efforts to get good places also; but, as a rule, they were done out of them, and had to content themselves with such second and third-rate accommodation as was allowed to

fall to their lot. And, in the meantime, all the hurry and bustle of renewed and increased packing went on up-stairs and down-stairs, while the "confusion" became "worse confounded" as time slipped by, and the hour of departure drew nearer and yet more near.

Breakfast on breaking-up day was always a splendid set-out as regarded the fare placed before the departing students; but, as regarded its being a regular meal in the sense of sitting down to it, it was a nonentity. In fact, no one had time to sit down, or if they had, they would not allow that it was so; and thus the ham and the beef, and the great pies, and eggs, and the muffins, and tea and coffee, were all consumed (in immense quantities too) standing; while the pushing, the collisions, the "scroogeing," and the row of hundreds of tongues all clack-clacking together in the highest possible keys, put the finishing touches on the mad scene. The Irish boys, late as they had been in bed, managed to be down in time for this feed, but the chaff that followed them was not one whit abated, and the most of them withdrew in high dudgeon, after sustaining the brunt of it for some time in vain. When the meal was about finished as well as he could judge, Red Weskit entered the hall with a large hand-bell, that he rang furiously to command attention. Then he cried out:

"Now then, young gentlemen! Whenever you're ready, I am to give out hats in the dormitories!"

The old man wisely withdrew behind the door, which

he shut and locked after him, when he had made the above announcement, betaking himself back to the den to get his keys before going up by the private staircase. The lads rushed tumultuously away from the hospitable breakfast-board up the great broad stone steps forming the chief approach to the huge sleeping apartments, and streamed in a wild, disordered mass—each one striving his very utmost to be first—down to the end, where Peter Westcott was eagerly expected.

“*Beati qui non expectant!*” “*Non disappuntantur!*” shouted out some would-be wag, as the throng of fellows kept increasing with the additions that poured in from every portion of the premises, and loud expressions of annoyance and disappointment rose from them. They could not understand Red Weskit’s not being there, after his pompous announcement, almost as quickly as themselves, and the growling thunder of murmurs and groans grew more and more ominous.

“Where can the old fool be?” queried Jack Hassard, whose warm blood seemed absolutely on fire to be off and away.

“Down in his den, of course,” was Bill Bolton’s remark; “I told you all yesterday how it would be. We shall be kept here pottering the whole day, and then miss our trains and have to come back. ‘It’s all your own faults in listening to his rubbish yesterday, instead of backing me up!’”

“What nonsense,” said Robinson; “why, you your-

self, Bill, agreed to what he said about the smashed hats, and were one of the first to leave."

"I didn't."

"You did—you know you did; and it's all your fault."

"What's the row now?" asked Gerald Blake, forcing his way through the crowd to the front rank, with his *Fidus Achates*, Mick Donovan, close at his heels. They had been out into the Beech Walk to cool the "angry passions" excited by the chaff and jeers sustained at the breakfast, and were just returned in time to take part in the present hubbub.

"The row is nothing to you, 'Maddy;' you won't want your 'ould caubeen' until to-morrow—so just mind your own business!" answered a great lumbering fellow, who was in a boiling rage at the delay. His train was one of the earliest to leave Buncombe, and he made sure of missing it.

"It's my business just as much as yours, you gawky oaf!" was the retort. "I and Mike have Principal's leave to go on the coach to Buncombe to-day to see you idiots off, and I suppose we shall want our hats as much as any of you—shan't we?"

"Going into Buncombe with us? Well, that's a good un, when there's barely room for ourselves!" cried Gilbert Robinson. "I'll take deuced good care you don't come on *our* coach."

"Yes, I will go on your coach, Mr. Impertinence! and I'll have my hat, too, before yours—that's more—

even if I have to badger Red Weskit's life out for it. But where on earth is the old chap?"

"Ay, where is he?" echoed a score of voices, the owners of which were all wild with impatience at the delay; yet no one offered to go and call him, for fear of losing his place in the crowd, and thus being a second delayed in the important hat distribution about to be made.

"For goodness sake, some fellow go and fetch him!" entreated Bill Bolton, looking round in semi-despair as the minutes ran on, and still Peter Westcott did not put in an appearance.

"Go yourself," suggested some one in the back row, "and if you return with him we'll let you be first served."

"Ay, do, Bill; there's a good fellow!" was urged by several, and, thus adjured, Bill Bolton made his way out of the mass, and descended to the den. On gaining that mystic *sanctum*, he found Peter Westcott in a most deplorable state of bewilderment—his huge bunch of keys for the hat-boxes was not to be found in its proper place, and he had no conception where on earth it had gone to. He looked, with Bill Bolton's help, everywhere over and over again. He turned out all his drawers and cupboards, nooks and crannies, but nowhere could the missing bunch be found, so that at last he was forced to make the best of his way to the dormitory to announce the fact, and beg of whoever was playing this stupid joke to say at once where the

bunch was, and let the work of distribution proceed without further delay. A regular yell of indignation and rage shook the rafters as Red Weskit thus appealed to some unknown villain for *mercy*; and the threats of punishment to the delinquent, whenever he should be found, were positively awful to listen to.

A number of the most energetic fellows banded themselves together at once to search the whole school, high and low, until they should find either the keys or their hider, or both; and it may show the earnestness of the proceeding when I mention that those of the most opposite parties and opinions willingly—nay, most eagerly—laid their peculiar idiosyncrasies aside to join hand and glove in this movement of detection and revenge. For instance, Gilbert Robinson paired off with Mick Donovan; Bill Bolton with Gerald Blake; and all set at once to work. Half an hour found them in absolute despair; they could find no clue, no trace whatever of either keys or culprit, so with serious faces they returned to the dormitory with accounts of their want of success, and an imperious demand that Red Weskit should at once proceed to break open *all* the boxes. This he positively refused to do. The amount of damage thus done would be really serious, while the disfigurement to the room itself would be very great. Red Weskit would not hear of it, and the storm he raised round his head thereby was terrible to contemplate. The boys were really becoming furious; so much so, that had the rows of cupboards, or rather

boxes, been made of deal in the ordinary manner, I feel sure they would have taken the matter into their own hands, and burst them all asunder in a few moments. But they were every one manufactured of solid hard oak; they had been put together by a carpenter and joiner famed in half-a-dozen counties for the solidity of his work; and they were fastened with hinges and locks that no unskilled hand could force. The boys were baffled, and some of them abused old Red Weskit most grossly. He stood it all patiently, and answered back never a word. The wild yells of passion and indignation were growing worse and worse every instant; the clamour was deafening and maddening; the squabbling and shouting of diverse opinions became more furious, when Gerald Blake managed to get on a form and obtain a partial hearing.

“Look here, you fellows! there’s no good our making all this confounded row; that don’t help us a bit to what we want. This old ——” (Red Weskit at this juncture coughed with such extraordinary loudness and vigour that the word was lost) “won’t try and smash ’em in; we can’t do it ourselves, so our best and only plan will be to march down to the Principal’s chambers, and ask his permission to have the cupboards broken open. It is quite plain none of us can go into Buncombe, for home, in our “mortar-boards;” time is slipping on, and the Principal is our only chance.”

There was a loud cheer in response to this appeal,

which was almost at once acceded to, and the whole body marched hastily off to masters' side to seek for Dr. Gunter. It was not without some trouble that the Doctor was hunted up. On such days as this he usually retired to the innermost recesses of the library, to shut himself out from all the noise and turmoil; but when he *was* found, he refused to listen to anything until the body of the scholars returned to their own side, when, having summoned Peter Westcott, he took some half-dozen of the leaders into his own private study, and commenced an investigation into the complaint. Peter could say nothing, except that he had seen the keys safe in their proper receptacle the previous afternoon, and that on going to fetch them after his breakfast-time announcement he found them gone. Robinson and Blake then explained the close search they had made without result, and that was all that could be said on either side. Dr. Gunter pondered for a few seconds before announcing his decision, which was to the effect that he was quite satisfied the fault lay with the boys themselves, one of whom *must* have taken the keys, for what motive he could not say; that, therefore, he could not accede to having the cupboards destroyed, and that they must find the keys before they could be allowed to go away for the holidays. This decision was a "facer," and no mistake, as Jack Hassard put it; and as the lads left the chamber to communicate it to the school in general, with the additional order that unless the keys turned up before one o'clock the coaches,

&c., must be dismissed, for that day at least, they felt, individually and collectively, in such fierce rages as would have made small work of the culprit, should he now be caught.

"We'll ate him alive without salt!" screamed out Mick Donovan, "the low, mean blackguard!" and each fellow looked round on his neighbour as if *he* must needs be the villain who thus destroyed the happiness of his fellow-students. But, search as they might, no keys turned up. At one precisely the coaches and flies were sent about their business, and the school settled down to a state of misery of mind and body that no one but a schoolboy can possibly appreciate properly.

Almost as soon as the boys were up the next day, Peter Westcott rushed into the bottom dormitory. "I do believe, young gentlemen, the keys is found!" he announced with breathless haste, displaying at the same time to those who ran up to question him, a scrap of paper found in the den, on which was thus inscribed:—

"KEYS AT BOTTOM OF POUND
IN MAISTERS' GARDEN."

"The fellow don't spell very well, anyhow," was Mick Donovan's remark; "but let us be off at once to search—lucky it ain't deep."

Half an hour's careful raking at the bottom of the shallow piece of ornamental water in the masters'

garden resulted in the fishing up of the ponderous bunch of keys that had caused so much trouble, not to say real and severe punishment, to the boys who had made up their minds to go the previous day. The hats were released and distributed; the coaches and flies, &c., were sent for, post-haste, from Pitchcot once more; so that by the ordinary time the whole of the fellows were in readiness to start, and only waiting the word from Dr. Gunter. The first to get under weigh was the well-horsed pleasure-van containing Gerald Blake, Mick Donovan, and the other Irish boys, and as they started at a gallop up the avenue (they were going by a cross-country route), the English fellows became perfectly rabid with rage as Gerald stood up on the seat demanding with a nose-applied thumb—

“Who has the best of it now, the ‘pig-drivers’ or the English gabbies who had to stop behind for their hats? Who stole the keys? Yoicks! go for’ard, boys! we’ve done the English ‘in the eye.’”

In another second their van was out of sight, and those left behind had to smother their revenge as well as they could, for they now knew that Gerald Blake and Mick Donovan must have been the fellows who stole the keys, just on purpose to delay them a day. Words cannot describe their passion at being so thoroughly “done,” and so I must leave them.

The after-lives of Gerald and Mick are without

much interest: the former is a rollicking M.F.H. in the Far West of Ireland—a dare-devil rider—a practical joker in a harmless and never-unkind way. Mick Donovan may be seen any day in the Four Courts, where as a successful barrister he still sometimes succeeds in deceiving the Saxon much as he did in the affair of the stolen keys.





Story the Fourteenth.

A TROUBLOUS TIME AT THE BEECHES.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNNATURAL SEASON.

EARLY spring-time, and yet none of the usual adjuncts of that season. A "Green Christmas" had passed away without the slightest symptom of frost or snow ; so that old men and women prophesied the "full churchyard" that goes to make up the proverb. January blustered not at all ; a damp, drizzling month it was, with none of the sharp, bracing air we feel so keenly, and yet benefit by so largely. February came in with a warm sun, so strong, indeed, as to force vegetation much before its time—a hot, dry air, with a general temperature far above the average. March failed to "come in like a lion," though it



KING'S BEECHES.

most undoubtedly went out like the mildest and meekest of unshorn lambs. The usual fierce gales that tell of the dread vernal equinox were entirely wanting; no wild gusts of storm and tempest came tearing across the troubled ocean, to clear away the miasma of the bygone year, and freshen up the overloaded atmosphere for the coming season; no overladen rain-clouds burst on our "tight little, right little island," to wash away the filth and poisons accumulated on the earth's upper crust, or to sluice out foul drains and sinks as they naturally ought to be sluiced out; no thunder and lightning came to purify and sweeten the air on which we live; and no man was bold enough to say that he had ever before known such an exceptional year. Then came in due course the natural consequences of such an abnormal state of things. The grass did not burst out through the earth with that fresh, vigorous green we expect at the spring-time of the year; the trees put forth their buds before their time in a dull, dead-alive sort of style; even the very flowers usual to the season looked unnaturally stunted, warped, and deficient in colour; and the winter evergreens drooped and pined for lack of their usual early rain-soakings. Cattle were uneasy and feverish, for there was little or no green fodder to freshen them up after weary months of stall-feeding; sheep suffered very much in the lambing season from the exact contrary of what they usually have to undergo—a too great heat instead of a biting cold; and horses in the hunting-field were "done up" with short runs

that would have had no effect at all upon them were the weather in its usual state. Then commenced the time when men too began to feel unpleasant effects. A sort of low fever set in in many parts of the country, but more especially along the sea-coasts—a fever that was unaccountably distressing, inasmuch as it baffled in a great degree all the efforts of the medical men to get the better of it—a fever that presented few tangible symptoms open to plain, straightforward treatment—a fever that did not strike the patient down at once on his sick-bed, retaining him there until death or life had secured the victory, but rather wore the sufferer away by slow and sure degrees, wasting his strength as a candle wastes before the fire, wearying out nature with a never-ceasing drag downwards, and extracting the vital power from the gradually weakening frame day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, with a cruel, slow, torturing certainty that was almost maddening to the sinking subject.

In the valleys and downs of Coastshire this low fever was specially prevalent; so much so, indeed, that hundreds—I might almost say thousands—fell under its baneful influence into a most lamentable drooping state, though as yet there had not been time enough for many to come to their deaths thereby. Every precaution possible was taken at Kings Beeches against contagion and infection; but the fever could not be said to belong properly to any known class of either contagious or infectious disease; the seeds of

the dire malady floated in the languid air, and no precautions seemed to be of the slightest avail. No one could tell who took it first. One by one the lads began to grow lazy and sleepy; tired heads fallen to rest over ponderous dictionaries became much more common than had ever been known before; aching brows were felt now by those who had hitherto scarcely known pain; weakness attacked muscles that had up to this time been like steel springs, so firm and so rebounding were they; activity became a thing of the past; games and sports of all kinds gradually fell into disuse, simply because there was no longer the energy necessary to keep them up; intense lethargy and lassitude set in, in spite of all the strenuous efforts made by masters and all to drive those deadly symptoms away by all sorts of fresh and interesting amusements; and by degrees one, and then another, and yet again a third, a fourth, a fifth, and so on, found they could not rise in the morning, that they were *forced* to succumb to the disease, and were at once removed to the Infirmary to undergo such treatment as could be devised. Medical treatment, indeed, was simply a farce; there was in the whole Pharmacopœia no specific against the malady, nor was there any drug that could be relied on to afford relief; sustenance, nourishment, strengthening things, were all that could be ordered, and they, I opine, belong more to the kitchen than to the surgery. The Governors of the College came down on the first intimation of an actual outbreak of the fever, and at once set themselves to do

all that possibly could be done to restrain its course, abate its virulence, or even (as they fondly hoped) to drive it away from Kings Beeches altogether. The best physicians that money could procure were brought down from London, not only to see those who were "down with it," and prescribe for them, but also to give their much-valued ideas on the sanitary arrangements of the place. Drains were flushed with torrents of water, and then opened to see if their communication was all that it ought to be; powerful disinfectants were constantly and religiously used with scrupulous exactness; the ventilation all over the College was seen to and put in order; in fact, no pains were spared that human ingenuity could devise to combat the disease in every possible way. But who can fight against the air, except to beat it idly and without result? The poison-seeds were *in the air*, and until heaven itself cleared that loaded atmosphere, man's best efforts were—of needs must be—futile. So the physicians said, and so it was beyond all doubt; therefore there was nothing left but to watch the cases as they occurred with a view to assisting the efforts of nature, and for that purpose one physician came down from town every second day, while a staff of trained nurses took up their quarters in the old College, to do for the suffering boys whatever female tenderness, knowledge, and that deft sick-bed handiness peculiar to the sex, could do to alleviate their miseries. Most of the lads that were still quite free from the disease were sent home to their friends at

once; the top dormitory, as being the most lightsome and airy, was turned into a huge infirmary; those whose parents were abroad, or who had no homes to go to (and there were many in these two categories), were kept as isolated as possible; while every possible means of cheering relaxation and amusement was employed to keep their thoughts employed away from what was going on in the sick wards. But, in spite of all precautions, the fever gained ground: one by one the numbers of the healthy decreased; one by one the sick-beds in the extempore infirmary increased; hope of lessening the power of the fell enemy, or of diminishing the list of his victims, by degrees died away, and a dark gloom settled down on Kings Beeches.

There was in those dreary days a bright, sparkling, gay young fellow, named Bertie Hargood, amongst the scholars. His parents had sent him from their far home in Australia some few years before, for an English education at the Beeches, with a determination to leave him there until he should have completed the entire course of study, and be fit to rejoin them as a young man with true British habits and true British gentlemanly tastes, capable of assuming his proper place in any society with which he might come in contact. In the meantime, he spent his vacations with an old grand-aunt in London, where, I am sorry to say, it appears that he had far too much liberty given him, and far too much pocket-money allowed, both of which things, with a total absence of any restraining male

influence, or beneficial male advice and example, exercised on him such a deteriorating effect as was deplorable to see. Be that as it may, Bertie Hargood was decidedly "wild," in the worst acceptation of the term; but, at the same time, his whole nature seemed so frank, open, and joyous—so entirely devoid of selfishness, and full of excellent social qualities—that even his masters, who had to find constant fault with him for the mischief he was *always* getting into, could not help loving him, while to his comrades he was hardly less an object of adoration than of affection. The worst point about him—one that he did not at all obtrude, but rather kept as much to himself as possible—was an entire absence of religious feeling; he hardly appeared to know what religion was; secretly he scoffed at what he chose to call its superstitions; while admiring and liking its real professors, he disliked and scorned that very thing they professed; in fact, he was an utter unbeliever in any form or ceremony whatever, while it was very much to be doubted if he even had any lively knowledge of a Supreme Being; but there was no doubt whatever that he looked upon the Bible as a mere half-historical, half-mythical, record of the existence, the doings, and the sufferings of a race of men named Israelites.

When the fever first attacked the school, Mrs. Cleaver, the grand-aunt above alluded to, was written to by the Principal (as were, indeed, all the friends and relatives of the other boys), re-

questing her to receive Bertie into her house until all danger should be past and gone. But the old lady would not hear of it: like many another old lady, her dread and terror of disease was existent to an unchristian-like extreme; she prayed that even no more letters from the infected college should be sent to her address; and wound up with a suggestion that her grand-nephew should be despatched forthwith to Australia—even going so far as to cut out of the *Times*, for the information of the Principal, the dates of the forthcoming sailings of the Peninsular and Oriental Company's steamboats. Not that Bertie cared one rap about going away; he much preferred to stay where he was; he "loved the danger;" he enjoyed the excitement, though he sincerely, and from his heart of hearts, pitied the sufferers; and thus he easily persuaded the Principal to allow him to remain at the Beeches with the other homeless ones. Nor was he the only one who thus elected to stay in the place of danger when a corner of safety was pointed out. A great friend of his—though, perhaps, the two were about as opposite in tastes and in character as fire and water—Ralph Melville, an orphan, positively refused to leave the Beeches for the proffered house of a relation of one of the masters who was much interested in the lad. He said, "If he had no home of his own, he must make a home of the old College; that there lay for the present his proper sphere of usefulness, and that he would not desert it for the pleasant refuge offered him in Nor-

folk!" So the Principal acceded to his request also, and the strangely different friends remained with a handful of others yet untouched by the fever. I have used the term "friends" above, when speaking of the two lads, somewhat unadvisedly. Close companions would be, perhaps, the better description; for their modes of thought—the whole interior of their lives—were far too wide asunder to allow of friendship in the exact acceptation of the term. Certain it is, however, that they were attracted towards one another in no slight degree; perhaps it was something on the principle of the moth and candle attraction—seeking and enjoying one another's society, as far as was possible, with a mutual keen relish that was all the more extraordinary from the marked differences between them. Bertie was hot, wild, and high; Ralph was cool, calm, and humble. Bertie was eager in all evil, cynical of all good, and impatient of all control; Ralph never ceased seeking after the "better path;" believed in, searched for, found, and practised everything good and virtuous; and was as submissive to, and as gentle under, authority, as a docile little child. Bertie secretly laughed at and derided devotion and all ideas of a future state of happiness; Ralph Melville's whole nature was imbued with reverence and love for the established truths of revealed religion—and yet, in spite of all, the two were never apart when they could possibly be together.

But in this time of general danger they became even

more united than formerly ; for, yielding to urgent and constant solicitations that “would not take No for an answer,” the Principal at last consented that both should devote a portion of each day to reading, talking, and otherwise endeavouring to alleviate and amuse those poor fellows stricken by the disease, for which purpose the two were separated from the sound ones of the flock, and allowed to occupy by themselves a room in the now deserted Grecians’ Grove. The Principal was perfectly convinced, both by his own common sense and the evidence of the physicians, that the fever was not infectious, and hence he had no fear in granting the lads the permission they so eagerly begged for.

CHAPTER II.

WHICH SHALL CONQUER?

"RALPH!" said Bertie Hargood, one close morning in the early summer-time, when they went out for a stroll in the Beech Walk, "I have got it at last!"

"Got what, Bert?" was the quick query, as Melville started violently and peered intently in his companion's face.

"It, of course," was the laughing rejoinder—for Bertie would make a joke out of anything—"the fever. It has been creeping over me for the last fortnight. Last night I found it had seized me."

"Oh nonsense, Bertie! you are weak and nervous with all this watching and anxiety; your fancy is getting the better of you; let us go for a brisk, sharp walk, and I'll engage you'll feel as well as ever after it."

Nevertheless Ralph Melville was not at all satisfied with the result of his scrutiny of his friend's face; but he put much of his own uneasiness down to the start he had received, and the rest to the unwonted earnestness of Bertie's tone when he had said, "I have got it at last!"

"That's just it. I *am* weak and nervous. Did you ever know me so before for a single instant?"

Ralph was obliged to confess that he never had ; but still he looked on the thing as more fancy than anything else.

"No, Ralph ; you are mistaken," said the other, sitting wearily on one of the benches and leaning his head on his right hand ; "it is no fancy. I thought so myself at first ; I fought against the languor, the lassitude, the weariness—oh, the intense weariness ! I strove to keep the knowledge from myself with all my might, but I have failed to do so. I strove to keep it from you and from all others, and until now I have succeeded. You know what a pulse is by this time ? feel mine !"

With a foreboding of evil he could not repress, Ralph sat down and took the white muscular wrist held out to him. He was shocked at the weakness of the pulse ; he gazed anxiously now into the blue eyes—the whites of them were clouded with sickly yellow ; he examined the tongue—it was thickly coated with the fur of disease, as different as possible from the bright scarlet of its normal state ; he noted the wearied, listless face ; the form giving way every moment more and more to the deadening languor that was creeping all over it ; he placed his hand on the high noble brow—it felt dry and "scorchy," like the bricks in a hot-house ; he took the hand in his, only to experience the same sensation, with the addition that when he let it go it fell as though lifeless to Bertie's side. There was no earthly use in trying to deny those symptoms he

now knew so well ; his friend had the fever beyond all mistake or doubt ! Tears came in his eyes as Ralph arrived at that conclusion. He and Bertie had been so much in the danger, or in the presence, rather, of the enemy, that somehow they began to think themselves as beyond all chance of suffering from it ; they had soothed the last hours of some of those who had died, only to think themselves exempt from the operations of the Dread King ; they had quietly followed to the graveyard the bodies, and while sorrowing and pitying the deceased, had come to imagine that there was no grave for themselves—at least, for a long time to come ; and now when one of them calmly said to the other, “ I have got it at last ! ” that other was at once in a state of wild amazement, denial, fear, conviction !

But Ralph Melville was not one to yield to weakness once the first shock was over. He braced himself up, after he had proved to his own mind that Bertie’s words about himself were correct, with that strong effort which the true Christian can nearly always command ; he called on his nerve to do its duty, with success ; he looked the danger, for a moment, steadfastly in the face, as it were ; and then resuming his usual calm and gentle manner, he said—

“ Bertie, I’m afraid you’re right. You certainly have a touch of it ; but I think it is only a very slight one, that will soon, with your splendid constitution, pass away.”

"Perhaps it may, and perhaps it may not; I don't seem to care, somehow!" was the half-dreamy response, as Hargood hung his head in sheer drowsiness. In fact he had, brave lad as he was, fought long and sternly against the insidious advances of the foe. Knowing in his own mind that he was attacked, he yet hoped to gain the better of the disease by a plucky struggle; he had employed every agent he could think of to keep up his strength and to drive away that awful lassitude that would come; but he could battle no longer, and that morning of his confession of the fever found him in a very bad state indeed from its silent ravages. Ralph took him into the house with such consternation—he *could* not that eventful day keep his calmness for long—depicted on his face, that Red Weskit (who never quitted his post at the Beeches, though urged, begged, nay, commanded to do so) at once divined what was the matter, and helped him to carry Bertie up to the dormitory, where only so very lately he had been acting as cheerful nurse and delightful reader to many an aching frame. They placed him on a cool bed, and at once called the head nurse to see him.

"Poor young fellow! Such a brave boy and a careful—such a good heart and a tender hand as he had—he has the fever, indeed, bad," was her whispered verdict, as she looked at Bertie lying half-unconscious on the couch. And from that time out, Ralph Melville intuitively learned that his friend was

far more severely attacked than any of the others had been.

Day by day Bertie Hargood grew weaker and yet more weak—that is to say, bodily ; his mental strength was as great as ever ; indeed some of the masters went so far as to say that the latter was greatly increased, and that the more feeble the corporeal frame became, the more powerful, vivid, and sharp grew the forces of the mind. So it might be ; but to Ralph Melville and his more intimate relationship with the patient, this strength of the faculties, that others praised so, appeared to be the very infatuation of a madman. Hope as he might—and he did hope, and pray, and implore Heaven to have mercy and spare this boy so full of promise—he could not conceal from himself that the fever might, and very possibly would, end in—the grave ! Where then would be this dear one of his heart ? where then would be the strong mind they boasted of ? the defiant attitude that some foolish ones lauded and called true courage ? Ralph knew better ; there was no real bravery in ignoring the claims of religion ; in deriding the sacred things of God ; in mocking (for in fact it was little less) at the power of the Supreme Being. At times his friend's conversation about futurity, absolutely frightened Ralph out of all calmness and self-possession. I cannot set down here the horrible thoughts, the cruel unbeliefs, the almost blasphemous words that had their being in that lad's mind and on his tongue ;

let it be sufficient to say that in this respect he was as bad as he could be, and that he had not even reached the very outside threshold of true wisdom yet; for he absolutely knew no fear whatever of the Future. It was horrid to contemplate — horrid and most unnatural; and as, hour by hour, Ralph had to fight with the scornful, defying laugh of the patient; to argue hour by hour against the hideous mental sins that were eating up the soul of his friend; to battle hour by hour with infidelities and positive blasphemies that made him sick to hear them, his heart sank within him, and he could do nothing but pray and hope, hope and pray, that the great Creator would soften towards Himself that wayward heart—with its many impulses to good—and would at last open the eyes of the sinner to the desolation of the path he was so busily pursuing to destruction.

One very sultry afternoon, when there seemed no breath of free air afloat, no faintest sign of a breeze to cool the intense heat, Ralph slipped quietly into the compartment holding Bertie's bed, and sat down at the foot to watch silently while the invalid uneasily tossed and rolled to and fro in a dream-broken slumber. Oh, how wan and ghastly looked that dear face Ralph loved so well! how sunken were the cups of the eyes! how prominent the facial bones! and what hard deep lines the dull anguish of the slow burning fever had carved into the once smooth and ruddy cheeks! His sleep was evidently most troubled, and as full—to

the mind—of care—or a great deal more full, rather—than in waking moments, when Bertie still laughed and still kept up to the full his flow of high spirits. But the question arose, “Did not this sleep, bad as it was, do the body more good than the same amount of time spent in wakefulness?” Ralph decided that it did, so he allowed Bertie to sleep on, while he himself calmly and quietly read on the glorious lines of that glorious Book that shall never fail those who read it in a reverential spirit. Half an hour passed away, during the whole of which the sleeper’s dream kept him tumbling and tossing as before; only the mind’s picture was evidently more vivid; the groans came deeper and more often; he seemed to be struggling to do something or go somewhere in his dream, while something else always baffled and hindered him. At last he made a more violent effort than before—an effort that had the effect of rousing him and making him sit bolt upright in his bed, staring in bewildered amazement straight before him.

“Well, Bertie! better?” asked Ralph, taking the wan hand in his and fondling it, while he smoothed the hot hair back from the lad’s clammy forehead with the other, looking meanwhile straight in the enfeebled eyes with such a look of tender gentleness as I never saw in any other’s face but that of a woman, and that not very often.

“Oh, Ralph! I’ve had such a horrible dream!” was the half-whispered remark of Bertie, as he motioned

for a drink. After he had cooled his mouth he went on : "Such a fearful dream ! Do you know, I almost think I am beginning to be afraid ?"—this last with something of the old defying smile. "I really think I must be—and then, dear old fellow, you would say I was—getting wise. Doesn't your old Book say so ?"

"It does, indeed, Bertie ; the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, it teaches ; is it not true ?"

"Oh ! I don't know, I'm sure," was the reply, quite in the set form he always used. "I never was taught the Bible and those sort of things ; though sometimes I almost wish I had been—that I was brought up a good old chap like you !" There was a depth of sighing sincerity in the latter wish that Ralph had never noticed in his friend's manner before, and he heartily rejoiced at it as a really good sign.

"But the dream, Bertie ; you did not find it a pleasant one ?"

"No, quite the reverse ; it was awful, and I really shudder when it comes back to me ; it seemed so *horribly real* !" He seemed so earnest over the thing, so anxious to get it off his mind, and so desirous to seek for some sort of interpretation of it, that Ralph, although, as a rule, a great discountenancer of any attempt to attach real meanings to sleeping visions, felt it would be cruel to restrain him, and might even check or repress a salutary train of thought. Therefore he asked Bertie to give him an account of it, which the latter did, something to the following effect. He

thought, he said, that he was dying—dead! that he then went away a long, long distance to a far-off country that was very lonely and very dreary in the dull grey twilight prevailing; that after much labour and fatigue he saw before him a lovely garden, on which a brilliant sun shone with dazzling rays, and yet all around the sickening twilight remained intact. Towards this garden, in which he could dimly see, through the haze of the sunbeams, numerous persons walking, he made his way in hopes of joining them and obtaining rest. The journey was still a long one, and he was very weary and heart-sore before he got near it. But even then he could not see the figures more distinctly, except that they seemed to be disporting themselves to some exquisite music floating in the golden air. He made his way close up to the rim of sunlight marking the limits of the garden, and was just crossing the very line into it, when a great thorny black hedge rose straight up in his face, and drove him back bewildered into the twilight. Again he essayed the passage at another place, and again the hedge rose bristling with huge sharp thorns that sent him reeling back. Again and again he tried to effect an entrance in various spots; again and again the great black hedge drove him back. In his rage and despair, he flung himself on it, and struggled fearfully to pull it down, creep or push through, and even made violent efforts to surmount it; but the thorns pricked him terribly; the hedge seemed denser and yet more

thick and strong the more he struggled, while it rose unmistakably higher and higher the more he tried to get over it. At last he made one tremendous rush, determined to pass it, and in doing so he awoke to find, to his amazement, that he was in his own bed, with his old friend sitting calmly by him. While Bertie was, in a low and weak voice, telling this tale of his dream, the *reality* of it to himself was painfully apparent to Ralph. Bertie's face expressed vividly all the weariness of the grey twilight, the splendour of the light over the gardens, the dreadful repulse he received from the thorn hedge, the rage and despair as effort after effort was baffled by this mysterious and horrid obstacle, and the final rush that had resulted in his awakening—all were depicted on his features with an earnestness that seemed to imply that he believed all had *actually* occurred.

With considerable difficulty, Ralph soothed, comforted, and calmed down the excited lad, making him lie back on his pillows while he cooled him off with a huge palm-leaf fan into a gentle slumber, that was as resting and quieting to the mind as the previous one had been exactly the contrary. Then, when Bertie slumbered—peacefully this time as an infant—the other opened his Bible and read softly to himself some of those powerful words of hope, of comfort, and of strength-giving power that are scattered so plentifully up and down its pages.

CHAPTER III.

“MORS JANUA VITÆ.”

“TELL me what that horrid dream means, Ralph,” whispered Bertie the next morning. He had had a most wretched night, the nurse said, and had cried out several times during the dark watches for Ralph to come to him—to come and help him “to cut down the hedge.”

“Whatever he means by that, Master Melville, I’m sure I don’t know; but he was that earnest about it as quite gave me a turn that his head was gone, poor young fellow! And if you can ease his mind, or talk his idea out of him, it will be all for the best,” she added in a significant manner as she went about her business. So Ralph made up his mind to talk out the dream fully and fairly should Bertie revert to it, which the latter did the first moment of their morning interview. Now, curiously enough, and I think it argues in favour of some sympathetic affinity between the two, Ralph Melville had long ago, when he was only a very little boy, had a very similar dream, that had made an immense impression on him; and he now recalled that fact, giving Bertie the full details of his own vision, only with the difference that the hedge was not black and thorny, nor was the obstacle insuper-

able; for in time, and with strenuous efforts, he had mastered it.

"And now, Bertie," he went on, "when I dream of that beautiful golden country all is open and fair to me, and I walk wherever I like in its pleasant paths."

"You do, Ralph?—*really*?"

"Really and truly, so it seems to me, Bertie; but it is *only* a dream, you know."

"No, that's just what I don't know," was the answer, as the lad sighed and rolled uneasily on his pillow, "just what I don't know; and do you know I think it is *more* than a mere dream; I fear, oh! I have so much feared—is that a beginning of wisdom?—that it might be a warning!"

"Now, Bertie, don't excite yourself, there's a good fellow, or I shall have to leave off talking to you. A dream is a dream, and no more. It is wrong to look for meanings in them," was the grave reply. But Bertie was not by any means satisfied.

"Well, suppose for a minute that there is something in them," he persisted, "how would you explain mine?" Ralph pondered for a moment while Bertie's great blue eyes, gleaming brighter than ever with the fever, seemed to devour his inmost thought. He could not think there was wrong in laying before his friend the obvious meaning—supposing, as Bertie had said, that there was anything in it—of his previous night's dream. Soon he made up his mind, and began to explain to the sick boy, in carefully chosen lan-

guage, that he, the speaker, should understand the garden Bertie had dreamed of as being the land of the blest; that he regarded the sunlight as the rays of heaven; that the persons walking within were those who had led good and pure lives; and that the hedge of thorns growing up everywhere to prevent ingress was composed of the sins and follies enacted in this world below.

"Then you think if I die I have no chance of the garden, Ralph?" he questioned with unaccustomed earnestness.

"Bertie, do not put such a fearful meaning on my words! The mercy of God no man can measure, but we can all know that He hates and abhors all sin and defect, and therefore the very best have a constant labour before them to repent of what is past, to watch carefully their present actions, and to look forward guardedly to those they may have to perform. If you have done wrong, and are sorry for it, and determine to amend, and never, never do so again, then the great God will forgive you; the hedge will never grow up before you when you seek to enter the garden, and it will be yours to walk in all the bliss of the blessed for evermore!" There was a deep devotional tone in Ralph Melville's words as he uttered the above—a tone that brought conviction to his own mind, as well as to that of his listener, who, after a moment's silence, said:

"And you really think God would forgive me—

me, Ralph ? Oh, think what a wicked wretch I have been to laugh and scoff and dare—oh, could He *really ever* forgive such as me ?” There was a piteous cry in the boy’s voice as he asked this question ; there was a trembling he had never shown or known before ; there was the “fear” coming that is “the beginning of wisdom.” Nor need you imagine that Ralph Melville was the one to at all suppress that holy fear ; he rather encouraged it, for he knew well its powerful and beneficent effects ; but he did take it in hand and direct it into the right channel, where he allowed it to flow free and unrestrained. Quietly, calmly, but very earnestly, he pointed out to Bertie the sound, solid reasons on which are based the truths of Christianity ; he pictured to him (and then almost for the first time was it pictured to the boy) the load of sin that required atonement ; what that atonement really was ; how Christ shed his blood to save sinners, and win them to repentance ; and he wound up by tracing a beautiful picture of the joy over the “one sinner that repenteth,” and of the hope and trust that such a true repentance must bring to every parched and weary soul.

Just as quietly, calmly, and earnestly did Bertie Hargood listen, putting a question here and there that was most appropriate, thus proving how hard he was trying to thoroughly understand all he heard ; and, finally, he took Ralph’s hand in his with a far happier look than he had worn for many a day, saying :

"Ralph, I believe it all now. I fear God. Pray that He may forgive me. Oh, Ralph! pray to Him for me, and I will try humbly to pray also."

Then the other knelt down by the bedside, and, hand in hand with his friend, he offered up their joint petitions to the Throne of Mercy—petitions that were earnest, real, heartfelt; and when he had concluded, Bertie closed his eyes with a great sigh, as though a whole burden of sorrow had gone out for ever from his life, and gently whispered:

"I am tired, Ralph—tired and very happy; sit by me a little while I sleep." And then he dropped off into a sweet slumber, and if he dreamed again of the country, he must have dreamed that he was inside the garden, for the smile on his face was one of perfect peace and happiness.

When the great physician came down from London the next day, he found Bertie Hargood so very much improved, that he was quite cheerful over the case, and pointed out to the nurse the evident effect of some new nostrum he was trying as a restorative and strengthener. The nurse, I am sorry to say, felt in duty bound to curtsy her acquiescence in the great man's self-flattering opinion; but when he had gone by she smiled quietly to herself, for she well knew, from what she had seen and heard the previous day, that the real restorer was Ralph Melville, whose words of comfort, reconciliation, and consolation, had far more to do with the patient's state than all the anodynes that ever came

out of a druggist's shop. Indeed, Bertie Hargood rallied wonderfully; his rest was much better; his appetite improved; his high spirits (always, however, now tempered with reverence and devotion) rose higher than they had ever been since his illness; and most decided hopes of his recovery were freely expressed by those most competent to judge. But it was only a flash in the pan; his constitution had given way utterly under the prolonged attacks of the fever, and he himself never for one moment, after his last recorded conversation with Ralph, thought he would recover. He hoped he would, and he prayed earnestly that he would.

"I have so much lost time to make up for, Ralph," he would say with a wistful look; "so much to say to fellows who have heard me scoffing at religion; so much to do to remove all the scandal I made, all the bad example I have given; so much to amend; so much to repent of—oh, I do hope and beg of my God to grant me the blessing of recovery!" And Ralph would join in his wishes and in his prayers with all the marshalled forces of his earnest soul. But it was not to be; the Creator, in His infinite mercy, gave the repentant boy plenty of time, and to spare, to re-arrange his mind in the virtuous paths pointed out by Melville; ample time did He give him for penitence; ample time to show, by his altered language and habits, that his amendment was true and sincere—and then He paused. Who can gauge the Wisdom, the Justice, the Mercy of God?

Which of the wisest of us that ever has lived can say, "It would have been better had So-and-so lived longer, or died sooner?" There are things we do not, cannot possibly, and never will, understand, and therefore to speculate on them is mere folly. Peter denied his Master and his Lord; Peter, who had opportunities that no man ever had before or since; and, thinking on that great lapse, who can say, "So-and-so would have remained steadfast to the last had he lived?" God is the only one Being who can say those words; and it is hardly too much presumption to say that God, seeing that So-and-so will *not* remain steadfast, in His infinite mercy takes him away before the opportunity for sin occurs again.

A reaction speedily set in in Bertie Hargood's case. He grew weaker and weaker as the slow fever ate away all his strength, all his vital power. He faded away like a rose in the autumn-time; he seemed to imperceptibly waste like the driven snow when thaw has set in; the light of his once brilliant eyes was quenching rapidly; Bertie Hargood was dying.

"Drifting into the great lone country, Ralph," he feebly whispered one summer evening, when the heat was perhaps a little less intense than usual.

"Moving confidently to the garden, Bertie!" was the low reply, as Ralph smoothed away the golden curls and kissed the pallid brow.

"You told me the way to the garden, Ralph—and oh! I am *so* happy and *so* grateful!"

"Hush, hush ! be grateful to God—not to me."

Then, with gradually weakening voice, Bertie gave his friend some instructions regarding a few little keepsakes he wished sent out to his parents, for whose sorrow, when they should come to know of his death, he felt acutely ; and, after leaving some kind messages of advice and warning to some of the schoolfellows to whom he feared he might have given bad example, he laid his head softly against Ralph's heart as the latter sat on the side of the bed, and said he was tired—"so tired"—as he closed his eyes.

Ralph made a motion as if to rise and call assistance. The dying boy opened his eyes wearily once more.

"No—no !" he gasped ; "no one—only you and me. I go into the bright land—go well—leaning on you—no one else !" and the glance of boundless love and confidence accompanying the feeble words will never leave Ralph Melville's memory to his own dying day. So he sat on, supporting the fast-failing form in his arms until the sun went down ; supporting him through the deepening twilight ; supporting him, while the tears rained down his face in torrents, when the dreary, dark, lonesome night set in ; and supporting him when at last the moon rose. No one disturbed them ; no one came near these two in their agony—the one of Life's sorrow, the other of Death's pangs ; no mortal soul knew ever the dreary misery Ralph Melville endured till long after ; no mortal soul knew, or

ever will know, the thoughts of Bertie Hargood as the shadows deepened, and the day of his life melted into the night of death. For he was conscious the whole time. Ralph knew that well; for ever and anon, as he repeated familiar prayers or psalms that Bertie had come to know in these latter days, a slight pressure—the faintest possible touch it soon became—proved Bertie heard him, and it was an ineffable consolation to know that it was so. Soon after the moon got up there was a tremulous movement on his breast, and, looking as close as his raining tears would allow, he saw Bertie's eyes open and his lips working. He placed his ear as close down as he could.

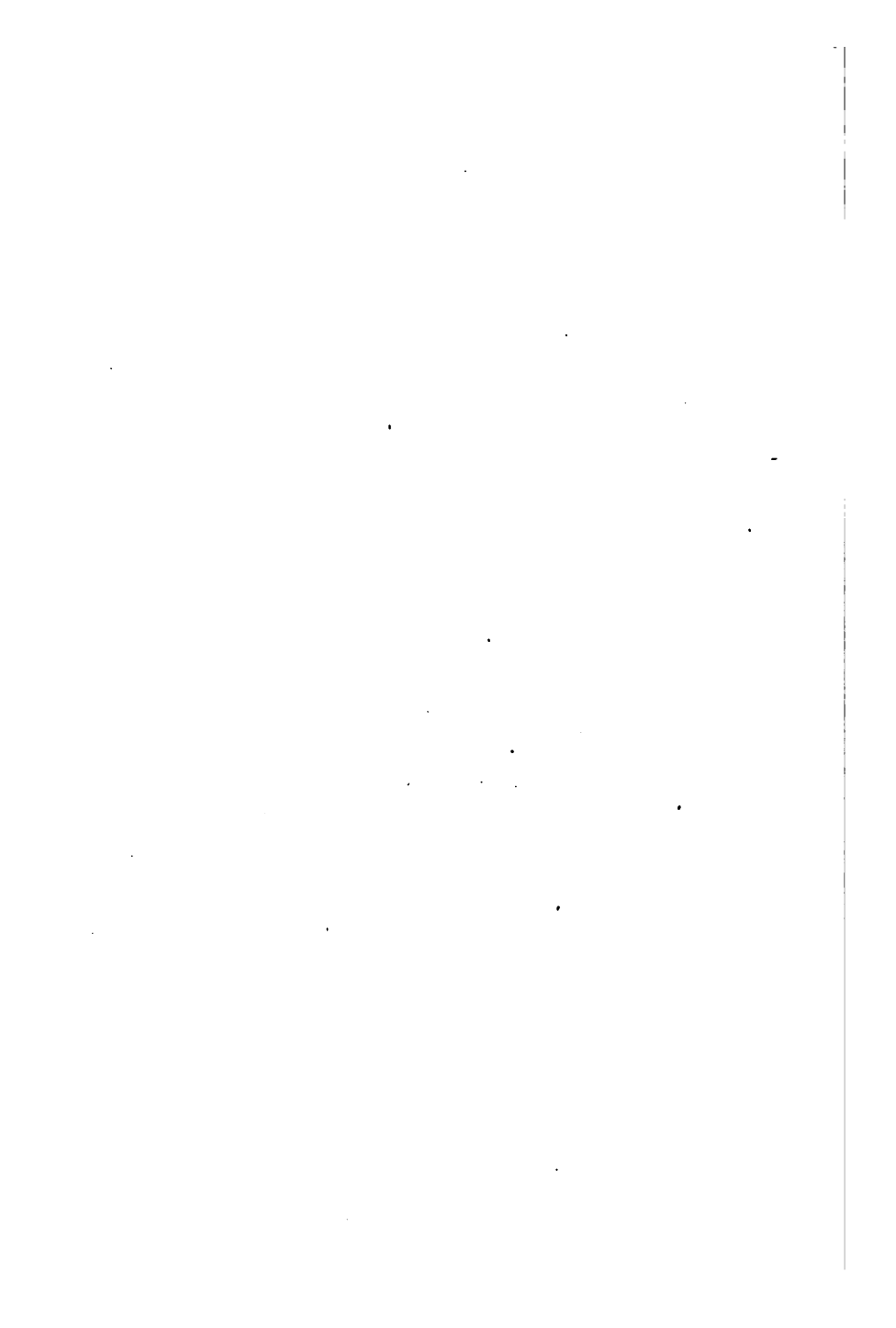
“Garden—happy garden—golden——” The sentence was never finished; one look of ineffable sweetness, peace, happiness, shone for a moment across the glazing eyes—one long shiver—and who shall say that Bertie Hargood did not at once pass for ever into the golden sunshine of the garden?

Soon after Bertie's death the fever began to abate, and in due course it died out. But of all who succumbed under its dire influence, no one was more bewailed by masters and boys than Bertie Hargood, while the touching story of his repentance and amendment no doubt led many a wild lad to think on the error of his ways, and amend his courses. To this day lads talk of him whenever fever is mentioned, for the incident of his dream is an embalmed legend that will never leave Kings Beeches.

Would you now seek for Ralph Melville? Go, then, and look in the wards of the hospitals in London; go to the "homes" where vice is turned into virtue, blasphemy to prayer; go to the dens where bad men congregate, and whence occasionally a soul is saved: ask, ask for the greatest, and yet the most generally unknown, Philanthropist in the great Babylon, and in the person who is pointed out to you, with gratitude and blessings, you will find Ralph Melville.

THE END.







the 1980s. The 1980s have been a decade of change for the world of work, and the 1990s are likely to be a decade of change for the world of work. The changes are likely to be profound and far-reaching, and they are likely to be driven by a number of factors, including:

- The increasing importance of technology in the workplace.
- The increasing importance of the service sector in the economy.
- The increasing importance of the global market.
- The increasing importance of the environment.
- The increasing importance of the quality of work life.

These changes are likely to have a profound impact on the way we work, and they are likely to require us to adapt our work practices and our work environments. The changes are likely to be driven by a number of factors, including:

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